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LIFE AND TIMES
OF
EDMUND BURKE.

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HISTORY
OF
THE LIFE AND TIMES
OF
EDMUND BURKE.

BY

THOMAS MACKNIGHT,

AUTHOR OF 'THE EIGHT HON. B. DISRAELI, M.P., A LITERARY AND POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY
AND 'THIRTY YEARS OF FOREIGN POLICY: A HISTORY OF THE SECRETARYSHIPS
OF THE EARL OF ABERDEEN AND VISCOUNT PALMERSTON.'

"A man worthy to be held in remembrance, because he did not live for himself."—*Burke*
Epitaph on Lord Rockingham.

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LIFE AND TIMES
OF
EDMUND BURKE.

CHAPTER XX.

1773-1774.

BOTH FOR OLD FEUDALISM AND YOUNG
DEMOCRACY.

IF there be one portion of Burke's political life which has more than any other been little noticed, it is that relating to foreign affairs. On this remarkable feature his biographers have been totally silent, and his most enthusiastic admirers altogether indifferent. Yet it is certainly one of his most distinguishing characteristics, and one, the absence of which must render the spirit of his latest writings almost unintelligible, and give but an imperfect idea of him as a statesman to whom nothing that affected the general interests of humanity was indifferent.

Wilkes and Middlesex, the East India Company, and the American Colonies, did not exclusively occupy his attention. While contending with every faculty he possessed for what he believed to be sound policy in the domestic arena of England, he took within the

range of his intellectual vision all the kingdoms of the earth, and, from the signs of the present, cast the horoscope of the future. Yearly, in the Annual Register, he continued to chronicle, side by side with the important events in English history, the occurrences on the Continent; and some of his general observations, reflections, and predictions, read like transcendent passages from a book of Destiny, pointing out the inevitable results of crime, and anticipating fate. Alone among British statesmen did he comprehend the consequences of the portentous revolutions then operating in the northern kingdoms of Europe. Alone among the statesmen of the world did he foresee, at the close of 1772, and foreseeing, place on record during the following summer, the disastrous effects on public law, on established authority, and every principle of good government and political freedom, which would follow from the partition that had been openly undertaken in Poland.*

He thus crossed over to the Continent at a most interesting time. An ancient nation had just been made the prey of three crowned despots. The barriers that custom, that justice, and that policy had erected against iniquitous violence, had been demonstrated to be impotent by the very persons who were most interested in showing a respect for prescriptive right and political morality: the high priests in the temple of Government had with their own hands sacrilegiously rent asunder the veil which shrouded the mysteries from the profane gaze of the ignorant multitude; and many signs indicated that the last hours of an old era were at hand. There were wars, and there were rumours of wars. There were re-

* Annual Register, 1772, chap. i. See also the remarks by Sir James Mackintosh, Edinburgh Review, vol. xliv. p. 380.

volutions, and there were rumours of revolutions. There were immoralities upon immoralities exhibited in the most elevated, and therefore most visible, points of society. The Semiramis of the North was pointing out to her obedient warriors the road to Constantinople with one hand, and seizing her share of Poland with the other. Absolute power, with the approbation of the populace, had been established in Sweden. A great court scandal had been exposed in Denmark, where a daughter of England had had her own life threatened, and had seen her minion led to the scaffold. In France, the last institutions which, however irregularly, preserved some organic remains of political life, appeared to have departed with the banished Parliaments. Throughout all Europe the prospect was gloomy. National freedom seemed to have arrived at its nadir, and arbitrary power at its zenith; and Burke, in bewailing the fall of the Parliament of Paris, in shedding a tear over the fate of Poland, in watching the rise of the colossal despotism of Russia, and in regretting the abject imbecility which was displayed in the foreign policy of England, followed in his mental vision the flight of Freedom from the western nations of Europe to regions still farther west across the Atlantic; and even for a moment dwelt on the possibility of some great convulsion shaking established society to its centre, and restoring the balance in favour of the oppressed. The whole of the historical portion of the Annual Registers for 1771 and 1772 is particularly worthy of the attention of those who would justly estimate the sagacity of his observations at the time of his first visit to France, or trace the gradual formation of his political views on France and Europe which afterwards surprised his contemporaries, because they had not watched their

development.* In those neglected pages the key to the most eloquent of his writings will be found. He never wrote anything more deserving of preservation than the general reflections in the first chapter of the Annual Register for 1772, which were inspired by the recent events in Poland and Sweden, and probably received additional fervour from what, in the February of 1773, had come under his own observation in Paris.

As the immediate object of his journey was the education of his son, Burke's first care was to see Richard settled comfortably in a provincial town, free from the resort of English. Blois, where Addison for a similar purpose had formerly resided, and where the peasants

* “The present violent dismemberment and partition of Poland, without the pretence of war, or even the colour of right, is to be considered as the first very great breach in the modern political system of Europe. It is not (say the politicians of the Continent) sapping by degrees the constitution of our great western republic, it is laying the axe at once to the root, in such a manner as threatens the total overthrow of the whole. Such is the condition of mankind, that we are ever in extremes, and when we have carried any one to its greatest extent of evil or folly, we fly back with equal violence to its opposite. * * *

“The idea of considering Europe as a vast commonwealth; of the several parts being distinct and separate, though politically and commercially united; of keeping them independent, though unequal in power; and of preventing any one by any means from becoming too powerful for the rest, was great and liberal, and, though the result of barbarism, was founded upon the most enlarged principles of the wisest policy. It is owing to this system, that this small part of the western world has acquired so astonishing (and otherwise so unaccountable) a superiority over the rest of the globe. The fortune and glory of Greece proceeded from a similar system of policy, though formed upon a smaller scale. Both her fortune and glory expired along with the system.

“Some of the most desert provinces in Asia have been repeatedly the seats of arts, arms, commerce, and literature. The potent and civilized nations have repeatedly perished, for want of any union or system of policy of this nature. Some Scythian, or other barbarian, has been suffered, unnoticed, to subdue his neighbouring tribes; each new conquest

have been represented as speaking French with the purity of the most exclusive Parisian supper-tables, was the place Burke had thought about before leaving England. But he ultimately decided upon Auxerre. There, accompanied by Mr. Thomas King, and under the superintendence of the Bishop of the place, young Richard Burke set himself diligently to acquire the language, which he afterwards spoke with much fluency. His father, after staying some days in the town, where he spent his evenings with the Catholic clergymen of the neighbourhood, and carefully noted their literary attainments and professional habits, returned to Paris, and wrote thence to the two friends as his children, making

was made an instrument to the succeeding ; until at length, become irresistible, he swept whole empires, with their arts and sciences, off the face of the earth. In the same manner, a banditti, who were afterwards called Romans, were suffered to accumulate power until they had subdued the bravest and fiercest nations, and became the masters and destroyers of the best part of the world. Each State looked on with indifference, or enjoyed a malignant pleasure at the ruin of its neighbour, without reflecting that the weapons and power of which he was deprived, would be quickly employed to its own destruction. * * *

“ The free States and cities of Germany seem to be more immediately affected by the present extraordinary transaction than any other part of Europe. Indeed, if the partition of Poland takes place in its utmost extent, the existence of the Germanic body in its present form, for any length of time, will be a matter rather to be wished for than expected. The extraordinary powers to which the houses of Austria and Brandenburg have risen within a few years, was already sufficiently alarming to the other parts of that body. Their natural jealousy and acquired animosity seemed, however, to counteract their ambition, and to afford a tolerable security that they would not join in any scheme destructive to the other States ; at the same time that their near equality made it impossible for one to be dangerous while opposed by the other.

“ The hopes founded upon these specious appearances were but short-lived. By one of those extraordinary movements of the human mind which are as little to be foreseen as accounted for, and of those unexpected revolutions which at certain times take place in all human

no difference in his manner of addressing them, and giving them the kindest and most anxious advice about their studies, and the best method of regulating their small economical concerns. “Always,” said Burke to the young men, preserve a habit “of giving (but still with discretion), however little, as a habit not to be lost.”*

This duty having been performed, he was at liberty to examine the condition of French society in the capital. He remained nearly a month in Paris, and never forgot what then met his keen and penetrating gaze.

Louis XV. was still alive, but his inglorious days were fast drawing to their close. He had been always a sensualist of the lowest grade, but with age his gross impuri-

affairs, the Emperor is become a personal admirer of the King of Prussia; and these two irreconcilable enemies enter into a combination with a third, whom they both mortally hated and feared, to join in the destruction of a power with whom they were all in alliance, who could not be dangerous or prejudicial to any of them, and whom they were all bound to protect by the most sacred treaties, guarantees, and declarations.

“It is but a poor satisfaction to the present sufferers, to reflect upon what may afford some instruction to posterity in the event, that the ruinous effects of this cruel, unjust, and shortsighted system of policy may, in all human probability, most fatally revert upon the two powers who have so unnaturally entered into the combination. Poland was the natural barrier of Germany, as well as of the northern crowns, against the overwhelming power and ambition of Russia. Some small alterations in the system of government, which might have been accomplished with little violence and infinite benefit to the Poles, would have rendered this barrier inexpugnable. If the princes of Saxony, who so long governed this country, had profited of their advantage, this reformation in the government of Poland would have long since taken place. A great writer of a former age affirmed, that if ever the Turks conquered Germany, it must be through Poland; it may now with greater justice be affirmed, that it is the road by which the Russians will enter Germany.”—Annual Register, 1772, chap. i. pp. 1-4.

* Correspondence, vol. i. p. 426.

ties seemed to increase. Every day some fresh scandal of himself or his friends was spoken of, and people whose lives were spent in frivolity and dissipation, still professed scorn and disgust for the folly and debauchery of their aged but not venerable sovereign. Madame du Barry, lately a prostitute, now the mistress of his Most Christian Majesty, dispensed all favours, received the smiles of courtiers, set up and pulled down ministers, virtually governed France. Her black page and her monkey were worshiped by a degenerate nobility, who, having no other faith, fell down and adored the playthings of this reckless courtesan. France has frequently been grossly outraged. But never did she suffer so foul an insult as when she saw a degenerate descendant of St. Louis place her lilies at the feet of a Du Barry.

One purifying influence alone penetrated through the corrupt atmosphere. One figure there was around which the light of poetry shone, and tinged with a lovely hue the dark clouds which hung over Versailles. The Dauphiness, Marie Antoinette, was there, in all her youth, beauty, grace, and innocence; and there Burke beheld that fair face and graceful form which at eighteen charmed all beholders. There was no care then seated on that noble brow. Those deep sparkling eyes communicated happiness and joy to all who came within their glance, and seemed incapable of expressing that sternness and severity which misfortune and sorrow afterwards blended in the look of Marie Antoinette. The long oval face, refined aquiline nose, dazzling complexion, full under-lip characteristic of her Imperial race, and rich blond hair arranged with the utmost care and skill, combined with many nameless attractions to set off a being who, as the heiress of France, the daughter of Maria Theresa, and

the descendant of a long line of Emperors, stood forth as the goddess of the universe, wanting no charm that fortune could bestow, appealing to all that was noble and chivalrous in man's nature, and impressing Burke himself as the most enchanting vision his eyes had ever beheld. The statesman was fascinated. The heart of the man of genius was subdued. Marie Antoinette on that day made a conquest of which she little dreamed, but of which she had reason to be proud. She had gained a knight whose eloquent pen, more potent than all the lances of the crusaders, would call nations to her rescue, enlist in her cause human nature itself, and, conquering death and defying the malice of her persecutors, cause the sympathetic tears of many generations to fall over the immortal page which perpetuated the memory of her wrongs.

She was not even then universally popular. An alliance with her native country was contrary to the old prejudices of France; and the partition of Poland, in which France had no share, had deeply wounded the national vanity. "Sire, this is the effect of the Austrian alliance," said the Duke d'Aiguillon to Louis XV. "This would not have occurred had Choiseul been here," was the monarch's reply. D'Aiguillon had supplanted Choiseul, and he and his colleagues, the Chancellor Maupeou, and the utilitarian Abbé Terray, assisted by the hoary debauchee, the Duke de Richelieu, held on by the petticoats of Madame du Barry. They were an edifying company; such a ministry as England had never known, and such as she certainly never would endure. Yet the Norths, Hillsboroughs, Suffolks, and Weymouths, who in this European crisis held the policy of England in their hands, were not better statesmen,

and had even less spirit. George III.'s narrow-minded obstinacy was as injurious to England as Louis XV.'s shameless vices were to France, and under similar circumstances would have produced not less fatal consequences.

Burke learnt much. His reputation had gone before him to the Continent, and the French Ministers talked to him unreservedly on political affairs. In particular he was admitted into their counsels relating to the partition of Poland, about which all men were then talking, and wondering what part the western kingdoms would take. With internal rage and mortification, he found that, weak and distracted as the French Ministry at that time was, yet, had England not held back, France was prepared to form an alliance to rescue Poland from the clutches of her spoilers. French memoirs of these times confirm this testimony: it was a policy which D'Aiguillon, from enmity to Choiseul and Austria, was likely to adopt; and since Burke wrote deliberately of what he had himself personally observed, there can be no doubt of its correctness. Yet, strangely enough, though this emphatic declaration on a most important matter of secret diplomacy has been published for many years in one of his most brilliant writings, it has escaped the notice of all English historians; and they have tried to excuse the acquiescence of the English Cabinet in the partition, by the imputed reluctance of the French Government to interfere in a cause which would have justified, if any earthly cause ever did, the most determined measures and the most heroic efforts.*

* "To my certain knowledge, if Great Britain had at that time been willing to concur in preventing the execution of a project so dangerous in the example, even exhausted as France then was by the preceding

But on the part of the French Ministers this was but a flicker of real patriotism. They had other work on their hands quite as important to them as saving Poland. The cunning D'Aiguillon had to humour all the fancies of Madame du Barry. The Chancellor Maupeou had to read the libels which appeared daily, breathing detestation and rage from the friends of the banished Parliaments. Abbé Terray, as Controller-General, had to ruin everybody who would not bribe his mistress and emulously bid for his favours. The finances were in a desperate condition. The King's tradesmen were being ruined; his menials starving; even salaries and pensions remaining unpaid. The carabineers and grenadiers had been cashiered; and the words Economy and Retrenchment had become fashionable. But what then? The financial Abbé Terray must put money in his own pocket; and "where," he asked with impudent frankness, "could he put it better?"

Good society laughed at this repartee. Good society had its own duties to perform. It had to sing vaudevilles about the King's mistress; it had to make sparkling epigrams; it had to discuss the merits of this singer or that actress; it had to talk about the last distinguished persons who had braved the anger of the Court and visited the retired Choiseul at Chanteloup; it had to make inquiries about the health of the patriarch at

war, and under a lazy and unenterprising prince, she would have at every risk taken an active part in this business. But a languor with regard to so remote an interest, and the principles and passions which were then strongly at work at home, were the causes why Great Britain would not give France any encouragement in such an enterprise. At that time, however, and with regard to that object, in my opinion Great Britain and France had a common interest."—Thoughts on French Affairs.

Ferney, and to study the last licentious or atheistical effusion of Diderot.

Philosophy was the rage. All things were resolved into first principles. Metaphysics and physiology were blended into a sensual atheism, which was loudly uttered in the presence of servants and at the most fashionable assemblies. Voltaire had been more than twenty years absent from the French capital, and his pupils had gone far beyond their master. Thorough-going atheism had supplanted his milder deism; the *Contrat Social* had shaken the foundations of all law and order, which he thought not of overturning; after the banishment of the Parliaments, a cry for liberty, in which he did not join, had been raised; and amid the destructive elements which he had so powerfully stimulated, he might be considered as a Conservative, if not a Tory. The women of fashion were not less hardy in their speculations or purer in their morals than the men; and not being better, they were certainly worse.

Madame du Deffand and Mademoiselle de L'Epinasse, the two model women of French society, were very different persons from Burke's friends, Mrs. Vesey and Mrs. Montague. Still more were they unlike the lady of his own domestic hearth. Of such women, indeed, English wives and mothers neither then nor now could form any idea. They dressed in society, they lived in society, and they might be said even to die in society. Mademoiselle de L'Epinasse regarded it as a virtue to obey the dictates of passions which it is considered the virtue of her sex to resist. She lived a life of unrestrained impulse, unguardedly pouring out her sentiments, and servilely offering her heart to any one whose person and manners appealed to her imagination. Always writing enthusiasti-

cally about her love, she thought not of marriage, and was even ready to choose, with singularly unfeminine disinterestedness, a wife for the lover whom she professed to adore. She was the slave and victim of successive passions ; and addressed each successive idol in the most fervid strain of enthusiasm. She was the epistolary Sappho of the time and nation in which she lived ; the eloquence with which she related the story of her affections creates something of similar admiration ; she appears to have met with a somewhat similar return, and to have suffered a somewhat similar fate. She was in the course of this year to have her bosom torn with passionate devotion for M. Guibert, whose *Tactics* had been recently published, was much talked of at this season, and of the Preface to which, treating of the decline of the military art in France, Burke while in Paris expressed much admiration.* It was around Mademoiselle de L'Espinasse that the Encyclopedists assembled, and it was in her apartments that Burke met the men who most directly gave French literature its irreligious tone, and whose writings were most peculiarly French.

At Madame du Deffand's he also supped frequently. Aged and blind, she too had her passions and sensibilities of the heart. If she had many divinities, she had but one devil, and that devil was *ennui*. A fashionable hostess, suffering under the most severe of human afflictions, could not, with all her vivacity, be very pleasant company ; and though Madame du Deffand did her best by always turning her face in the direction of the speaker, and by making the motion of her hands in some measure atone for the absence of the twinkle and roll of the eyes ; though her suppers were excellent, her conversation

* Madame du Deffand to Horace Walpole.

brilliant, and her company the most distinguished in the Parisian world; Burke was far from thinking, with Hume and so many other English persons of that day, that this society was the most delightful civilization could afford. Madame du Deffand gave suppers expressly in his honour. He met at her table brilliant officials who had been in the Government under Choiseul, facetious prelates who affected to be dashing men of the world, charming Duchesses and Countesses who spoke readily at second-hand on all things, from Voltaire's last tragedy to the materialistic philosophy of Helvétius. But he was not altogether at ease. Though his habitual modesty and general affability delighted Madame du Deffand and her friends, in all that he saw and heard he found matter for grave reflection. Then his French pronunciation was not much better than Hume's. Madame du Deffand declared it execrable. He learnt also that in France, as in England, he was suspected of being Junius, and he must have received many compliments from his polite entertainers on this subject, which could not be so agreeable as they expected.*

The atheism of the men of letters gave him the most disgust. He who had in his youth dared to expose the sophistry of Bolingbroke's infidel speculations, was not likely to see with perfect approbation the expansion to their logical results of the doctrines of which Bolingbroke had formerly been the apostle, and which, while Voltaire was in England, had powerfully encouraged him in the design of undertaking his long crusade against Christianity. Burke did not remain a passive listener to the blasphemous tenets of this Philosophical Church.

* Lettres de la Marquise du Deffand à Monsieur Walpole, vol. ii. pp. 409-416, etc.

He defended with his usual eloquence, though in barbarous French, the cause of religion ; and the unhesitating atheists found to their surprise that a man of genius was not ashamed still to stand reverentially by the altar. Such effect had his championship of Christianity over the minds of his profane antagonists, that Walpole, whose French information was always good, stated that Burke had made as many converts as St. Patrick.

It was a strange world. Speculating on everything, and respecting nothing ; proclaiming the impotence of their individual reason, and unsettling all that former generations had piously established ; putting weapons into the hands of the untaught multitude, while ignoring their existence ; boldly affirming the most indefinite propositions, and caring nothing for the circumstances in which they were to be applied ; generalizing, syllogizing, ridiculing, blaspheming : to what were these men tending ? Had they but looked at the world which was then moving around them, and about which they were so profanely dogmatizing, their confidence in themselves and their logic might have been rebuked. Burke never forgot that they who were then perpetrating the greatest of all political crimes were not the monkish bigots, but the royal pupils of these same philosophers ; that the philosophic Empress of Russia, the philosophic Frederick the Great, and the philosophic Joseph II., were then partitioning Poland. If such was the effect of the assertion of absolute rights and extreme theories of liberty on the minds of kings, what was likely to be their effect in a time of convulsion on a populace who should acquire power without being taught its responsibilities ? Hating abstractions as Burke did, appealing constantly to experience as he did, accustomed to the practical work-

ings of English politics as he was, it is not surprising that he should have listened with outward politeness, but with real scorn, to those complacent sciolists of the drawing-room and the supper-table, who really knew so little, while thinking that they had brought human reason and true philosophy to absolute perfection. Without any exaggeration it may be said that the poorest Englishman who reads a newspaper in an evening at a mechanics' institution, and thus sees legislature carried into practice and all public measures fully discussed, knows more of the real science of government than did those Continental philosophers of the eighteenth century, who, utterly unacquainted with practical politics, wrote so unreservedly on the origin of all society, the rights of all mankind, and the duties of all governments.

Burke returned to England early in March. The first discussion in which he took an active part after his arrival again on the scene of his duties, could not but, by the contrast it afforded to what he had just beheld in France, be deeply impressive. It gave him the opportunity, which he immediately seized, of expressing strongly his opinion on the tendency of French irreligion.

The Bill for the relief of the Dissenters from subscribing to the Thirty-nine Articles, considerably modified in detail, but in the same spirit as that which was thrown out by the Lords in the preceding year, had again been introduced into the House of Commons. It was opposed in its progress by a petition of some dissenting Methodists from Chatham, who, accepting themselves the Calvinistic articles, were indignant that other Dissenters should be afforded a liberty they did not themselves require. Of all kinds of intolerance this always appeared to Burke peculiarly hateful. Better however a blind zeal

for religion than a blind zeal for atheism. Better the intolerance of Sir Roger Newdigate, Sir William Bagot, and their new allies the Methodists round the lines of Chatham, than the intolerance of all piety and open ridicule of all that had hitherto been considered sacred, which Burke had combated at Paris, and which, in cheap and simple treatises, had begun to be disseminated among the lowest classes of France.* Better to cling fanatically to old errors, such as society has been accustomed to, than to embrace as fanatically new paradoxes, and precipitately to act upon them with undoubting faith. To a mind full of what was then being heard and seen on the other side of the Channel, this debate on the Protestant Dissenters' Relief Bill showed, as in a glass, the essential difference between English and French society in 1773.

Burke did not at once hesitate to proclaim where the danger really was. After having condemned the intolerance of the Methodists, he even more strongly condemned the intolerance of the philosophers. With exalted fervour and prophetic inspiration he warned all who were interested in upholding established authority. "Under the systematic attacks of atheism, I see some of the props of good government already begin to fail. I see propagated principles which will not leave to religion even a toleration, and make virtue herself less than a name. I see myself sinking every day under the attacks of these wretched people." His French admirers, who had been so eloquent in his presence on their favourite theme, the absurdity of all religions, would have been somewhat

* Correspondance Littéraire, Philosophique, et Critique, adressée à un Souverain d'Allemagne, depuis 1770 jusqu'à 1782. Par le Baron de Grimm et par Diderot, vol. ii. p. 411.

surprised had they known that the English statesman repaid their enthusiasm, respect, and hospitality, by immediately declaring from his place in Parliament that, as proselytizing atheists, they were the enemies of society, the outlaws of the human race, and the only just exceptions in the most comprehensive scheme of toleration.* Never did the orator more beautifully depict the mild spirit of Christian unity ; never was he more fervently eloquent in advocating the toleration of all Christian sects, than immediately after his personal contact with the rampant atheism of France. Even the sturdy country gentlemen who held fast by the Articles of the Church in all their extreme dogmatism, were affected by the fine picture of Christian charity, and real, though not formal comprehension, that Burke had drawn ; and while voting and speaking against him, could not forbear expressing their admiration.†

But he was soon again at the task he had almost relinquished in despair in the Christmas recess. The East Indian business had scarcely made any progress through Parliament, and was, in truth, but beginning. The Ministers had hitherto remained, as usual, indolent and apathetic. A few days after this debate on toleration, a petition was presented from the East India Company, requesting a loan of a million and a half of money for four years, and under certain stipulations. Lord North, seeing that the Directors were at the mercy of the Administration, determined to dictate his own terms. On the 23rd of March he proposed two important resolutions affirming the expediency of granting

* Speech on the Protestant Dissenters' Relief Bill, March 7, 1773. Collected Speeches, vol. i. p. 163.

† Cavendish MSS., Bibl. Egerton., vol. 240.

the Company pecuniary relief, but at the same time restricting them from declaring a dividend above six per cent. until the loan should be repaid, and from making one of seven per cent. until the bond debt should be considerably reduced. There was a warm and animated debate, in a full House, and with a crowded gallery.

Burke particularly distinguished himself. He had wished to keep silent on measures which it was utterly unavailing for him and his few followers of the Rockingham party to resist; but his indignation overcame his prudence, and he delivered himself of a passionate invective against the resolutions, and the whole policy of successive administrations with regard to East Indian affairs. He made an elaborate parallel between the conduct of the French Government towards the French East India Company and the conduct of the English Ministry to Leadenhall-street. The House laughed at his enthusiasm. He said that he was always glad to make honourable gentlemen merry. He invoked the shade of poor Alderman Beckford, whose shrill voice, in 1767, like the call of the early horn to a hunting match, had first excited the imagination of statesmen by hyperbolical representation of the riches of the East, and encouraged Parliament to share in these magnificent acquisitions; and he asserted that there was then not a lawyer with a rag of gown on his back, or a tie-wig upon his head, who declared himself in favour of the claim of the Crown to these Eastern possessions.

This speech gave rise to a long altercation at his expense. Conway once more commenced the attack. He was followed by the Speaker, who thought that Burke had most unjustly assailed the legal profession, and who showed himself more conscious of the crowded audience

in the gallery, to which he twice directly alluded, than would be now thought consistent with the dignity of the imposing presence before whom the mace is carried, and who is supposed to be, unless his attention is particularly called to it, quite unconscious of the existence of strangers. A tool of the Treasury afterwards, and at last Barré also, continued this war of somewhat contemptuous reprehension. The Colonel, with his patron, Lord Shelburne, was now closely allied with Chatham, and carrying on a vigorous epistolary correspondence with his chief. It was therefore but natural that he should defend from Burke's sarcastic sallies the memory of the departed alderman who had been the most devoted of Chatham's admirers, and whom Barré called the most illustrious citizen that ever sat in the magistracy of the capital. No person ventured a word in support of Burke until Dempster rose; and then the House was not inclined to listen to an East Indian proprietor who was there avowedly to speak for the Company.

"I really can't go on without attention," faltered Dempster. "I beg pardon," said William Burke, "you must exert yourself." There was much less circumlocution in Parliament before the debates were regularly published. Members did not hesitate to say to each other plain truths in a plain manner, such as would now be considered intolerably rude, and even sordidly vulgar. "I have endeavoured to do my duty," replied Dempster, mildly, "and if I were to speak till midnight, I could do no more." Another Member stood up; but the House had grown more impatient than ever. "It now grows late, therefore keep to the question," said Conway to the new orator, who soon resumed his seat.*

* Cavendish MSS., Bibl. Egerton., vol. 245, pp. 123-126.

The first resolution passed without a division. The second, after a conversation rather than a debate, met with a similar reception. Opposition was annihilated. The most extreme politicians forgot all their hatred of the Court, in gratifying their prejudices against the East India Company, and encouraging the popular animosity.

The revolution in the Administration of India was rapidly pushed forward. It became an excitement. The passions both of zealous patriots eager for reform, and of disappointed plunderers eager for revenge, joined in harmonious action against the Directors and Proprietors in Leadenhall-street. Resolution after resolution was proposed and carried, either by irresistible majorities or without any division at all. The right of the State to all acquisitions made by the arms of the State, was asserted. The proceedings of the servants of the Company were unequivocally condemned. Lord Clive, the ablest, the richest, and the most illustrious of the Englishmen who had risen to eminence in the East, after being rewarded with a peerage for his eminent services to his country, found himself unexpectedly in the position of a culprit, and was treated like a sheep-stealer.*

Burke had but little sympathy with Clive. As a politician, the great general of India had supported Grenville, and, since that statesman's death, had looked for shelter to the Throne. He was therefore by Burke regarded as one of the detested confederacy of King's friends. The crimes, too, which the impetuous warrior had undoubtedly committed in his treatment of Omichund, and his transactions with Meer Jaffier, were such as Burke never could

* Cavendish MSS., Bibl. Egerton., vol. 245, pp. 123-126. The Cavendish Reports of the last debates respecting Clive's delinquencies, have been clearly copied out, and will be found extremely interesting.

under any circumstances bring himself to consider justifiable. They were however not without some excuse. They had been committed long ago. They had been committed while their author was at the same time rendering great services to his country. They had been committed in that chaotic period of a new empire, when nothing seemed yet organized, and the broad landmarks of equity and policy had not appeared clearly defined on the cloudy horizon. They had, above all, no similitude with the remorselessly cruel deeds which afterwards stained the Indian administration of Hastings. Thinking thus, and refusing to play the game of the Ministers, who threw out these Indian grievances as a tub for the thoughtless whale of the Opposition, he refused to number himself among Lord Clive's persecutors; and at nearly five o'clock in the morning of the 22nd of May, when the decisive vote was come to, which, had it been successful, would have ignobly branded the man who had founded the Asiatic Empire, Burke, who had taken scarcely any part in these warm debates, shrunk from affirming Burgoyne's condemnatory conclusion, and was one of the exonerating majority who voted for the previous question. With a breaking heart and darkening intellect, Clive still, during the few months of life that remained to him, gratefully remembered the unobtrusive kindness Burke had shown him in that unparalleled crisis, which became in effect a death-blow to his haughty and sensitive spirit.*

Clive's enemies also remembered the vote Burke had given. They thought it inconsistent with the fervent hatred of corruption he had displayed, and did not hesitate

* Annual Register, 1773, p. 106. Letter to Garret Nagle, in Monthly Magazine.

to taunt him, in the debates immediately following, with a manifest leaning in favour of Indian delinquency.

An important Bill, by which Lord North undertook to correct the abuses of the East, was passing through its various stages. It was called the Regulating Act, marked an epoch in Indian legislation, and totally changed the point of view from which Burke had hitherto looked upon the Company, and those who in its name governed Hindostan. This celebrated measure disfranchised all proprietors holding only five hundred pounds' worth of stock, and raised the qualification for a vote in the General Court to those who owned a thousand pounds' worth of these securities. It reformed and attempted to render independent the Board of Directors, by rendering it in a certain degree perpetual. It gave a superintending authority over the other Presidencies to the Governor of Bengal, who was henceforth to be styled Governor-General ; and it provided him with a Council of four Commissioners, in which he was to have a casting vote. It also created a Supreme Court of Judicature, independent of the executive authority, and with vast powers, which neither those who framed nor those who approved of the Bill took pains to define. The names of the new officials were added in committee. Warren Hastings had been for nearly two years Governor of Bengal ; he was in the new Act appointed the first Governor-General of India. The other blanks in the Bill were filled up with the names of Barwell, Clavering, Monson, and Francis. Barwell, an old servant of the Company, was then in India ; and the other three Commissioners, whose reforming patriotism was expected to produce such great effects, were to proceed from England. By this Act, and its accompanying auxiliaries, founded in resolutions to which the dismayed

Directors were compelled to submit, Lord North considered that the Asiatic Empire was tolerably regulated, that the petty princes of Leadenhall-street were effectually dethroned, and their lackered sceptres reduced to pieces of mere fire-wood.

They had, indeed, asked for one boon which was partially and cunningly granted. They had requested permission to export their teas free from duty, that their over-stocked warehouses might be relieved, and their capital be more disposable. The threepence on the pound levied in America, was of course included in their demand: the drawback in England was allowed, but the colonial port duty was retained, as George III. himself declared, for the express purpose of keeping up the right of imperial taxation.* This has indeed been considered the King's favourite and peculiar measure, and was primarily intended not so much to aid the East India Company, as to bribe the Colonists, by the remission of a large duty in England, to pay the hateful threepence in the pound which was levied in their own ports. Neither George III. nor his advisers thought that the scheme would be utterly futile, nor that in the excited state of the Colonies it might bring on a crisis. It is not true, however, as historians have asserted, that this immortal expedient met with no objections.

The Rockingham party saw the folly of the short-sighted plan. Burke and some of his associates in Opposition thought that unless the threepence in the pound which had against their remonstrances been imposed in 1767, and which they had repeatedly endeavoured to repeal, were done away with, no positive good could possibly result from this voluntary sacrifice of revenue. "I tell

* Correspondence with Lord North.

the noble Lord," said the plain and vernacular Dowdeswell, "that if he don't take off that duty, they won't take the tea." The enlightened merchant, Trecothick, with his great commercial experience, made a similar objection, and spoke against the proposal. But the Dysons and the Jenkinsons, as became them, earnestly defended their royal master's chosen expedient, and treated lightly all warnings. Lord North was equally eager in its support. No visions of the destruction of the tea in Boston harbour, of the American Congress, of the bloodshed at Bunker's Hill, of the capitulation at Saratoga, of the Declaration of Independence, of the surrender at Yorktown, of the humiliation of England, and of the establishment of the great American Republic, ever flitted before the mind of this easy Minister, who was playing so hazardous a game for so deep a stake. He concluded the brief debate by declaring that the Americans did not deserve the repeal of this paltry duty, and that in short, unless he should think it absolutely necessary, it was a string he would not touch.*

Burke sat gloomily silent while this and other inconsiderate measures were passed. He felt the futility of all resistance. Almost every measure that Lord North proposed during this session was contrary to all the Member for Wendover's ideas of sound statesmanship; but it was no use repeating nightly warnings that he had already so frequently and so vainly urged. The Regulating Act had been read a first and a second time; it had gone through committee; it had even been read a third time. He had only opened his lips once throughout these discussions, and that was on a matter of detail, and not on the general merits of the measure.

* Cavendish, MSS. Bibl. Egerton., vol. 246, pp. 1-10.

He took the opportunity, however, on the question of passing the Bill, of once more delivering his sentiments. He candidly admitted that he only broke silence in justice to himself. It should not be said afterwards, when the measure was felt in its consequences, that it had received his tacit approbation. He confessed that his strong opinions were generally attended with strong feelings; but that nevertheless it was not prudent to be always coming in collision with the momentum of the House. The Bill was the result of Parliamentary wisdom to cure disorders which all the forces of Parliamentary obloquy had been long employed in exaggerating. He condemned the disfranchisement of the small proprietors, and the perpetuation of the Board of Directors. He analyzed minutely the general provisions for creating new political and judicial establishments. He made some observations on the men who were to compose the Commission of Government, and already unmistakably indicated an antipathy to the new Governor-General. "Mr. Hastings," said Burke, "is to have the casting vote. Mr. Hastings is the individual nominated by this Parliament. If all that has been said is true, if the insinuations of the Committee of Secrecy and the speeches of today are true, this man is guilty of everything charged against the Company. Yet this man is to be the First President, and to him is given a controlling power in the Council."*

After noticing respectively Barwell, Clavering, and Monson, he came to his future friend, and Hastings's future enemy, Philip Francis. "Mr. Francis I know. He has some personal character. If appointed legally and constitutionally, I know no person fitter for his post.

* Cavendish, MSS.: Bibl. Egerton., vol. 250, p. 208.

But I cannot be wiser than the law. I shall always think, whatever talents any one has about him, that the man who is legally appointed to his office is the fittest. I am obliged to know the law. I am not obliged to know men.”*

He then resumed his general argument, and concluded by denouncing the measure as an act which every one bore with, but nobody commended ; as an act from which nothing but confusion and disgrace could arise ; as an act by which the Minister, like a man who had been asleep half the day, and then went hastily to work with his eyes half open, endeavoured to make up for his former indolence by present violence.

How true all this was, the condition of India while under Lord North’s Regulating Act amply testified. The Governor-General, at one time a mere disregarded unit in the administration for which he was pre-eminently responsible, at another wielding absolute power ; at one time unable to protect the helpless natives from the oppression of an unscrupulous Chief Justice, at another bribing the same high official to be his accomplice in atrocious crimes ; the wisdom of the statesman, who almost alone condemned the Bill at the time of its enactment, was in this, as in so many other cases, ultimately justified by undeniable experience. In the very able Report on the Affairs of India drawn up by him, he may be seen at the commencement deducing the fundamental evils of Hastings’s administration from this unsatisfactory and inconsiderate measure. Even the Prime Minister, at a later period of the evening, was so far influenced by the objections Burke had urged, as to express himself very dubiously of those regulations, and

* Cavendish MSS. : Bibl. Egerton., vol. 250, p. 209.

was evidently desirous of removing the responsibility of this piece of legislation from himself to the majority of the House. It was indeed a rash, crude, and contradictory enactment, like most of the specimens of constructive skill which it was the fate of the great British Empire to receive from the ministerial workshop of Lord North.*

But, so far as Burke's immediate object was concerned, it would have been much better had he continued silent. He gained nothing but obloquy and abuse by his opposition, and his party, strengthened by the Indian interest, only divided twenty-one. As generally happened, the coarsest reproaches that he had to bear, came from some of his old associates, who had deserted their former friends, and endeavoured to keep themselves in countenance by abusing the man who had faithfully adhered, under every temptation, to his original principles. Sir William Meredith took the place of Conway as Burke's assailant, and this evening delivered himself of a violent personal invective.

Sir William was a highly respectable man. He was said formerly to have been a Jacobite; but he had for many years been associated with the best friends of public freedom. A Member for Liverpool, he spoke with weight as the representative of that rising popular constituency. During Lord Rockingham's administration he had been a Lord of the Admiralty; he had faithfully followed his leader into Opposition; and for a time had enjoyed a consideration in the party scarcely inferior to that of Sir George Savile. One of the earliest of Burke's Parliamentary friends, he had from him had no political secrets, and had with him stood gloriously

* Ninth Report on the Affairs of India, 1783.

by the Constitution. They concurred fully in a general reform of the criminal law, at a time when no persons but themselves in the Legislature, and none of the public instructors out-of-doors, except perhaps poor Oliver Goldsmith, were struck with horror at those wantonly bloody enactments. But there were defects in Sir William's idiosyncrasies. His understanding was a little confused. Though he spoke with the utmost seriousness, and there was generally on his countenance an expression of deep gravity, his meaning was not unfrequently obscure, and he was sometimes thought very tedious. He seconded Burgoyne's motion for the Select Committee of Inquiry; he seconded some of the strongest resolutions against Lord Clive; and this business of the East India Company afforded to him, as to many other patriots, a convenient bridge by which he could pass over from the barren rocks of the Opposition to the fertile plains and sunny skies of the Ministry. Being however so eminently respectable, and possessing, or being thought to possess, a very scrupulous conscience, he was very uncertain in his conduct; as soon as he had taken a side, and pronounced himself strongly in favour of a particular policy, from that moment his breast, like that of Falkland, began to feel the feverish paroxysms of doubt and the sharp stings of remorse. With significant action Burke had, in a debate before the Christmas recess, alluded to him as one of the very pillars of the House that had shaken and given way; and his internal struggle rendered Sir William keenly alive to his old friend's sarcasms.*

On this evening, therefore, he began to gratify his

* Walpole's *George III.*, vol. i. p. 350; and his *Collected Letters*, vol. v.

new allies by reviling Burke. He hinted that the orator who had just declaimed against the Regulating Act, and had recently refused to stigmatize Lord Clive, was influenced by a sympathetic feeling for the rapacious Nabobs, and by a democratic dislike of the old families ; that he was encouraging the excesses of those who had plundered the people of India ; and being very ungrateful to the borough for which he sat in Parliament, and whose patron, Lord Verney, was known to have lost much by speculations in the Indian funds. Sir William stopped abruptly, however, in the midst of these pleasant personalities, saying that he was very tired, that he had lost his voice, and that he wanted something to eat.*

Burke rose again, with a suppressed smile upon his lips. At such an unexpected and unjustifiable attack, the meekest of men might have been indignant ; but the good temper with which Burke replied to his accuser was especially observed.† “The honourable Member has regretted the loss of his voice. I was not sensible of any deficiency in his vocal powers. He has certainly spoken his insinuations out pretty strongly. I am very unfortunate. Sometimes I am reproached with being very poor, at others with being very rich ; sometimes as the friend of an exclusive aristocracy, at others as the supporter of an unbridled democracy. I am to be punished whether I agree with the majority or the minority.” He did, he said, not make his vote a means of obtaining power ; neither did he look, as he assured Meredith, like a man who was going to be a Minister. He was not travelling in that direction ; Sir William would not have him for a competitor ; nor could he un-

* Cavendish MSS. : Bibl. Egert., vol. 250, pp. 226, 227.

† “ He spoke,” says Cavendish, “ in great good-temper.”

derstand how the doing of an act of justice could be associated with any idea of democracy.

Sir William was not silenced. But he changed his ground. He would keep his temper, as Burke had recommended. His conduct had been uniform. He knew that Burke's breast was the faithful repository, and his pen the faithful exponent, of the principles of party combinations. But not agreeing with these principles, and being told in a certain publication to reform and seek other company, he had sought other company. He humbly disclaimed all ambitious motives, and observed that as the present Parliament could exist but for a short time, and as he might never sit in another, he and Burke would perhaps soon take leave of each other.

Burke laughed. With a little contemptuous irony he gave Sir William his good wishes, whether, according to classical authority, he chose dignity with ease, or, as seemed more probable, he was about to be placed by the Prime Minister in a great employment.

This insinuation nettled the sensitive Sir William. Quite forgetting his promise to keep his temper, and pointing to Lord North, he called out loudly to Burke, "Make your words good."*

He might have discreetly spared himself this exhibition of virtuous indignation. He soon himself made the words good. Sir William shortly afterwards appeared at Court with a white stick as Controller of the Household, and was also made a Right Honourable.

The debate was continued by Fox. His speech is principally remarkable for the just compliment to Burke with which it began. Though opposing the views of his great instructor and strongly prejudiced against Lord

* Cavendish MSS.: Bibl. Egert., vol. 250, pp. 229-234.

Clive, Charles treated Sir William Meredith's accusations with scorn, and said that Burke's ideas on Indian affairs had been strictly consistent and straightforward. "I think," Fox stoutly declared, "that he is the only man who has met the question boldly, and opposed the measure on consistent ground." These words are indeed the best commentary on Burke's Eastern policy, from 1767 until this arrangement was effected, when he for the future considered the Ministers responsible for the good government of India; looked upon the Company as no longer an independent Corporation; and believed the circumstances to which his former principles applied altogether reversed.*

Fox was again in office. Knowing himself however to be personally disliked by the King, and, through his father's kindness, no longer having the dismal prospect of debt and ruin before his eyes, he was gradually losing his horror of opposition. But the most powerful cause which contributed with others to produce this revolution in his sentiments, was undoubtedly the close friendship which was established between him and Burke. When it was first rumoured in the preceding autumn, that Fox was to become a Lord of the Treasury, Burke rejoiced at it, because it would be the means of forwarding Richard's claim to his contested purchase in the tropical island of St. Vincent. Nor was he disappointed. As far as the matter depended on himself, Fox gave the most earnest proofs of his friendship by pressing the business with extraordinary activity. While Burke was in France there had been some discussions on the war that had just been waged between the Caribs and the King's troops; and the newspapers contained many reports and

* See Annual Register for 1774.

letters about the cruelty with which the Indians had been treated in the attempt to compel them, by force, to cede their fine plain, which is still called the Carib country. As Richard Burke's name was associated with a disputed claim to an estate in the island, many people confounded this asserted right with the violent proceedings of the Commissioners, by whom indeed it was strongly opposed; and Edmund, though he was himself most indignant at the treatment the Caribs had undergone, and highly disapproved of the war that had at last been undertaken against them, shared in this obloquy with his brother. It was said by one whose cynical nature delighted too much in circulating the scandal of the day, always first to ascertain its correctness, that the immaculate Burke, who had so loudly paraded his virtue, and his hatred of corruption, had no objection to make a fortune from the lands of those poor slaughtered Caribs.* Had the transaction really been as iniquitous as some of the bargains which were proposed by the Commissioners of the Crown at the point of the sword, it would still have been scarcely equitable to have made Burke responsible for what his younger brother had done in the West Indies. It would surely be hazardous to assert, without any evidence, that a claim was flagrantly unjust, and a mere attempt at extortion, which undoubted facts show to have been decided in Richard's favour by at least one of the departments of Government; to have been in its nature fully known to Lord Rockingham, and the other eminent members of Burke's party; to have been principally opposed by the Chief Commissioner for the disposal of the lands at St. Vincent, Sir William Young, who was openly accused in Parliament as the author of the cruel proscription of the

* Walpole's Collected Letters, vol. v.

Caribs ; and to have been strongly advocated at the Board of Treasury by Charles Fox.*

Nevertheless Fox's efforts in favour of his friend in Opposition were unavailing. Burke expected the business to be considered in the last meeting of the Treasury, after Parliament had been prorogued for this summer, and before the Ministers dispersed into the country ; but either then, or, as is more probable, at a later period, an adverse opinion appears to have prevailed. Had Burke been as warm a supporter of Lord North's Ministry, as he was its uncompromising opponent, the result might have been different. As it was, Richard Burke had to make up his mind to dispense with the considerable establishment his friends and his brother Edmund hoped that he had acquired. Good-humoured and volatile Dick, with a cheerful countenance, had to commence the struggle for independence once more. The affair of St. Vincent is now chiefly interesting to us as indicating the strength of the bond which was now so closely uniting Fox and Burke together.

Fox was under the spell of his friend's genius and integrity. The Prime Minister saw this unquestionable bias. He is reported to have said, in his easy and pleasant manner, "If we see a woman coming out of a bagnio, we cannot swear that she is not virtuous, but we should judge of her from her company."† Fox was gradually

* "I hear that Charles Fox's speedy coming into the Treasury is expected. This event would, I hope, not prove sinister to a very just claim."—Burke to Lord Rockingham, Nov. 11, 1772. Again, on July 19, 1773 : "Fox has pressed the St. Vincent's business with more activity than was usual with him."—Correspondence, vol. i. pp. 369, 433.

The editors of Burke's Correspondence, in giving these letters, apply them to a purchase of land in Grenada, though the text itself shows them to apply to the island of St. Vincent, or, as Burke himself calls it, "the St. Vincent's business." † Bisset, vol. i. p. 341.

recognizing that Providence had intended him for something better than a mere king's-friend. As his confidence in his own powers increased, his respect for Lord North diminished. It was not difficult for that masculine understanding to perceive that with difficulties pressing upon him from every quarter of the Empire, the Minister was utterly deficient in foresight, energy, and wisdom to grapple with them ; that he was embarked on a tempestuous sea, that was every day rising higher, without a firm hand to direct the helm, or a compass by which to steer.

Lord North had indeed no system. This very autumn, to the surprise of Burke and every politician whose judgment was worth anything, the Government which was preparing to go to war with the Colonies, rather than not exercise the abstract right of imperial taxation, was ready to adopt a proposal for taxing all the landholders of Ireland who did not annually reside six months on their estates.

Lord Harcourt had succeeded Lord Townshend as Irish Viceroy. The new Lord Lieutenant was eminently a courtly and refined nobleman ; and his personal and hereditary graces strikingly contrasted with the undignified jollity of his predecessor. His Chief Secretary was Colonel Blacquière, a clever officer of dragoons, who endeavoured to compensate for his ignorance of Ireland by gratifying the palates of her patriots with the most sumptuous banquets and the finest Margoux. But this was not enough. Irish politicians possessing excellent appetites, and requiring something even more substantial than a good dinner, all the resources of patronage were more profusely than ever called into operation, and the finances naturally became much embarrassed. As a lucrative means of supply, and to acquire at the same time

a little popularity to his administration, Lord Harcourt, in the course of the summer, sent over to England, with other projects, this absentee-tax, as one which the Irish Parliament, at its meeting in October, would probably adopt. The English Ministers made no difficulty about the matter, and informed the Viceroy, that should the heads of such a Bill, according to the usual form, be transmitted for the sanction of the Privy Council, it would receive the usual mark of approval, the impress of the Great Seal.*

Rumours of this design soon spread themselves abroad. They came to the ears of Lord Rockingham as he was nursing his feeble constitution at Wentworth, and to Burke as he was getting in a promising but delusive harvest at Beaconsfield. They both considered the project preposterously absurd. As it so happened, and was doubtless not unknown to the Ministry that had sanctioned the scheme, the great Whig noblemen who had been during almost the whole reign in opposition to the Court, were some of the principal landowners who would be affected by the tax. Lord Rockingham came to London, and set himself to organize a formidable opposition to this specious but impolitic expedient. In a letter which bears the strongest internal evidence of having been first sketched by Burke, and which was also signed by the Duke of Devonshire, and several other noblemen, the Marquis applied directly to Lord North, strongly denouncing the tax as unjustifiable, and requesting to know whether it had really been entertained by the Government. The Minister admitted the correctness of the report. Lord Rockingham then addressed two circular

* Correspondence between Lord North and the Duke of Devonshire. Annual Register, 1773, pp. 216-218. Hardy, vol. i. pp. 316-337, etc.

letters to the gentlemen pecuniarily interested in the measure, and advised them to be in readiness to hold a general meeting in London.

Lord Shelburne, as much as any one, disapproved of the imposition; but he would not co-operate with the other Whig peers in opposition. On applying to Chatham for his advice, the haughty Earl did not venture to say that he liked the tax, but informed his ally that all opposition to it ought constitutionally to be made in Ireland; and that were it to be passed by the Parliament of that country, he for one would not advise the Crown to reject this popular mode of supply. In much vague pomposity Chatham thought fit to ignore the facts of the question, which were, that the Government had itself chosen to countenance the proposal, and that, without this countenance, it would have little chance of being sent over to England from the Irish Parliament, or the collision between the provincial Legislature and the Crown on a Money Bill, as Chatham deprecated, have much chance of occurring.*

This was really the case. Lord Rockingham's seasonable opposition was successful. The motion was made in the Irish House of Commons, by Flood, and though it had originally met with the approval of Lord Charlemont, and many other respectable patriots, at the last moment the Lord Lieutenant having received the orders of his superiors in England to withdraw the support of the Government from the proposal, it was promptly rejected.

Burke, by his personal exertions, had no unimportant share in this defeat. Sir Charles Bingham, who was afterwards Lord Lucan, a member of the Literary Club, and

* Chatham Correspondence, vol. iv. pp. 299, 305, 319.

a constant attendant, when in London, on Mrs. Vesey's evening assemblies in Bolton Row, wrote to ask his opinion on the business. In answer to this communication, Burke, whose feelings were strongly interested, sent that masterly letter on the subject which is printed among his works, and which, with all candid and reasonable men, may be said to have fully disposed of this plausible specific for Ireland's wrongs. In this letter, as in his correspondence with Lord Rockingham on the subject, his tenderness to his native country unaffectedly and pathetically breaks out ; but this tenderness does not prevent him from being just to that great Empire whose complicated interests he was ever so desirous of reconciling. He thought that the principle of the tax was more injurious than the thing itself, and that it only came too consistently from men who were separating England from her Colonies ; since the proposal evidently regarded a residence in England as a crime deserving of punishment, and tended to disunite Ireland from the rest of the Empire. Just as he could not honestly admit that theoretically a power in Parliament to tax the Colonies did not constitutionally exist, though it ought never prudently to have been exercised except on a refusal of any of the provinces to defray a just portion of the expenses of government ; so he refused to accept of a proposition which struck at the liberty of a British subject to reside in any part of the British dominions. His object was ever union ; but not the uniform centralization of the abstract economist, and administrative official. Along with imperial authority Burke was ever desirous of preserving all local privileges.*

* Compare this letter to Sir Charles Bingham with the general reasoning on the right of taxation in the Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol.

Unhappily, at the time when this letter was being shown in manuscript, to Lord Charlemont, and other friends of Burke in Ireland, was working a pacific revolution in their sentiments, and was destroying in its bud this element of disunion ; in another portion of the Empire the germs of discord, which, in spite of his warnings, had been so long sown and carefully husbanded by the hand of the same Government, at once sprung up to gigantic maturity and overshadowed the broad Atlantic.

The tea-ships were upon the seas. To all representations of the impracticability of this exportation, even at the last moment, Lord North had not thought it unworthy of himself to reply that his Majesty was resolved to try the question ; and the hazardous experiment was to be attempted on men many of whose ancestors had fled to the desert from the tyranny of that martyred Sovereign who had the same imprudent propensity for trying questions with his subjects. The scheme was intended to divide the Colonies : it united them. It gave them time to devise expedients of resistance, to prepare their plans, and to act in concert. Hitherto the East India Company had sold their teas to the dealers in public sales ; but by now exporting them, as had been provided, on their own account, and appointing their own agents in America, they interfered directly with the business of the Colonial merchants, who of course became as ready for violent measures of resistance as the old militia-men of the French war, and the rude Puritanic husbandmen who thought themselves contending for that freedom which their fathers had so intrepidly asserted. With singular infelicity, at Boston-members of the Governor and of the Deputy-Governor's

family had been appointed consignees, although they had become so hateful to the Colonists by the discovery of a highly injudicious correspondence with influential persons in England, that a petition for their removal from their situations, as enemies of their country, had been sent to the King. The Bostonians, as Burke afterwards described in one comprehensive sentence, "thought that they saw a monopoly formed in favour of the most obnoxious persons, and that too, for the purpose of confirming an odious tax."* At Charleston, at Philadelphia, and at New York, determined measures were almost simultaneously taken. The consignees were nearly everywhere intimidated into resigning their appointments. There were nearly everywhere speeches and resolutions at public meetings, and promises of mutual succour and support exchanged in private conclave and in secret correspondence. But it was at Boston, which had already given indications of its stubborn and resolute spirit, that, from many concurring circumstances, the most desperate resistance might naturally have been expected to be made.

Even at the present day Boston is the most English of American towns. New York is at best but a hybrid capital, in which German and French tastes are somewhat incongruously blended with the original Dutch. The English traveller who lands at Boston feels himself at home. The narrow, straggling, and intricate streets, the rude but massive warehouses, the bridges, wharves, ferries, and railway viaducts, the sober and business-like air of the place as contrasted with the feverish excitement of the more bustling cities in the New World, the signs of established wealth, and unpretending stabi-

* Annual Register, 1774, p. 48.

lity that everywhere meet the eyes, all bespeak the stern and earnest Englishmen who planted the standard of hardy and energetic civilization in the wilderness, while boldly struggling against the primeval granite, and the aboriginal tribes. The Puritan character had become harder and more intensified, until the Bostonians, who had already considerable experience in resisting Parliamentary regulations by forcing Stamp Commissioners to resign their offices under Liberty Tree, stood forth like their native rocks, sharp, angular, defiant.

On one of the last days of November the first tea-ship appeared at the mouth of the harbour. She proved to be The Dartmouth, and had of course been called after the pious Colonial Minister, whose precise methodism it was hoped might render him acceptable to the equally precise New Englanders. But what was piety when associated with slavery? The rude Bostonians would no more have respected Lord Dartmouth in person, than they did his namesake, as, laden with a hundred and fourteen chests of the abhorred tea, on their Sabbath morning it was last brought to anchor. Even religious scruples yielded to political necessities. The owner of The Dartmouth was obliged to promise that he would not enter his ship at the Custom-house until Tuesday. A large meeting was held the next day. An armed guard, who passed the watchword like regular sentinels, was set by night upon the ship. The owner and master were compelled to engage that the tea should be sent back; and the persons interested in other two vessels which were hourly expected, had no choice but to enter into similar stipulations. These hateful ships at length arrived, and, that they might be under the same guard as The Dartmouth, were moored at the same wharf.

The die was cast. The East India Company, the Parliament, the King, were all defied. That foolish German mother who was always saying to her royal offspring, "George, be King," had at the same time forgotten to teach her son that his subjects were also men and freemen, with blood that had never sympathized with high monarchical or even Parliamentary authority, circulating in their veins. His Majesty's wishes would be really gratified. The question would be effectually tried. But, alas for rulers who, reversing the natural order of things, assume towards their subjects in the last earthly arbitrement the relative positions of litigious plaintiffs towards compulsory defendants, as in a mean court of artificial law! In such times established authority was naturally placed on the defensive. It was not wise in it to become the assailant. It was not wise in it to persist obstinately in driving to a final determination questions which in the swift and inexorable progress of events would come up of themselves quite soon enough for judgment, and which it would have been well for all who then sat in the high places of the world, if they could have been deferred for ever.

Something it was necessary to do. In twenty days after the entrance of the ships, their cargoes must either be entirely landed, or be liable to seizure by the authorities of the Custom-house. In twenty days they might be taken under the cannon of the Castle, thence easily conveyed on shore, and the gigantic infant, American Democracy, then coming vigorously into life, prematurely drowned in an infusion of tea. The sands of time were fast running out. The owners of the vessels would have gladly conveyed the tea back to England as it came; but it was no easy matter to get again into the open sea.

The consignees refused to release them from the responsibilities of their charters. The Custom-house would not grant a clearance. Without this form being duly complied with, the Governor would not grant a permit for the ships to pass the Castle. The guns were loaded. Two vessels of war, the Skylark and the Kingfisher, took up positions commanding the outlets from the harbour.

The last of the twenty days, a day ever memorable, at length arrived. A crowded meeting of anxious Bostonians was held in Old South Church. As the December daylight slowly waned, some candles were lighted, which threw their faint and fitful gleams over the rugged faces of the Colonists who were waiting to know finally whether or not the Governor would allow the ships to return to England. His refusal was at last communicated, and the meeting broke up.

But this result had been expected. At the porch of the sacred edifice the Indian war-whoop was heard. About forty figures, painted and disguised like Mohawk warriors, rushed down to the harbour, took possession of the ships which were lying alongside of each other, and immediately began to make preparations for throwing the tea into the sea. Such a proceeding as this might reasonably have been foreseen, as the time for the unloading of the vessels expired, and clearances and passports were obstinately refused. But the infatuated Governor, rejoicing in the dilemma in which he had thrown his enemies, had spent the day at his country-house; and neither the civil nor military authorities interfered to prevent the catastrophe. The two armed vessels of the Royal Navy remained passive, and did not even make a menacing display of their iron teeth. The business

of destruction was rapidly carried on. The silent stars shone in the sky, and the heavy surge of the vast Atlantic, as it broke against the fifty islands at the mouth of the bay, added a hoarse but impressive accompaniment, while crash after crash of the breaking tea-chests came like sweet music to the ears of the New Englanders, who, with resolute brows and eager eyes, endeavoured to pierce the gloom of night, and watch attentively until every pound of tea that the three ships had brought was swimming on the salt waters.*

At nine o'clock the work was done. In New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston, if the freights met with not so summary, they met with quite as unfortunate a reception, so far as the object of the exportation was concerned. And thus did the proceedings against the East India Company, of which Burke had so much disapproved, hasten the birth of Democracy on the shores of the New World ; while the Old Feudalism he had at the beginning of the same year contemplated in France, would unwisely exhaust its last efforts in fostering this mighty son of rebellious nature, that, like the kindred race of giants in the old mythology, would heap mountains upon mountains, climb Heaven, and, with brandished arms, at once sacrilegiously and suicidally defy the very gods on their eternal thrones.

All was, however, not yet lost. Though the crisis had indeed come, by wise counsels England might yet retain America in the path of filial duty and natural

* There are many discrepancies in the different accounts of the events which so directly produced the American war. In no English history have I seen so concise, clear, and logical a general narrative as that which Burke himself evidently wrote for the Annual Register of 1774. Mr. Bancroft, in his recent volume, has added some interesting and authentic details.

obedience. One of the first acts of the Bostonians after their victory, showed a kind of pathetic compunction which a sagacious statesman would have spared no pains to encourage. Eager to have the first word in England, they hurriedly despatched their own account of the outbreak, that it might arrive before the more inflammatory narrative of the deluded and deluding Governor.

The resolution of the Colonies not to take the tea was known at home before the ships arrived at their different destinations. But as no decisive news could be received for some weeks, Parliament was not summoned until January.

On Colonial affairs the King's Speech then preserved an ominous silence. The debate on the Address was unusually apathetic, and the aspect of affairs unusually quiet. No person could have supposed, either from the language of Ministers or from the passions of parties, that a great crisis, not only in the history of the British Empire, but of the universal world, would take an indestructible character from the acts of the new session. The warmest debates were on navy estimates. It was that deceitful calm which, both in the political as in the natural world, is so frequently the forerunner of the devastating storm.

An event which alone excited interest, was not Parliamentary, but judicial. The Privy Council were to consider the Massachusetts Petition to the King for the removal of the Governor and Chief Justice from their situations. The letters on which this determination was founded, had been transmitted from England by Dr. Franklin, the Agent for the Province, and the Deputy Postmaster for America; but as the means by which he had obtained them were unknown, and sup-

posed to have been not very honourable, the propriety of his conduct and the allegations of the Petition were naturally associated together. On the twenty-ninth of January the philosopher was to be heard by counsel in support of the Petition. As the question had become so much a personal one, all who took any interest in Colonial affairs were desirous of witnessing the expected scene in the Cockpit at Whitehall.

That Saturday morning, Dr. Priestley, though despairing of obtaining admittance into the Council Chamber, was walking in Parliament Street. He met Burke and Dr. Douglass, who was afterwards Bishop of Carlisle, and had long been honourably known in literature as the critic who had exposed Lauder's forgeries. Burke, introduced unto each other as men of letters those two divines of such different creeds, and then asked Priestley whither he was going. "I can tell you where I should wish to go, Mr. Burke." "Where?" "To the Privy Council, but I am afraid that I should not be able to get within." Burke said, "Come along with me," and hurried off to Whitehall. The anteroom was so full of people, that Priestley exclaimed, in despair, "We shall never get through!" "Give me your arm," replied Burke, who soon elbowed both himself and his companion to the door. "You are an excellent leader, Mr. Burke," said the gratified Priestley. "I wish others thought so," was the ready rejoinder. The compliment was certainly not undeserved; for as soon as the door was unlocked they were the first persons who entered the room.

They immediately took their stand behind the first chair, next to the President's. The room soon filled, and at least thirty-five Peers sat at the board. Franklin,

venerable by his age, venerable by his genius, stood dressed in a suit of spotted Manchester velvet, confronting men who were nominally his judges, but really his inveterate enemies. He was supported by two counsel, one an eminent follower of Lord Shelburne, and the other a not less respectable adherent of Lord Rockingham. Dunning, with his emaciated features and feeble voice, was more than ordinarily repulsive in manner; but his matter appeared to Burke, as ever, admirably logical, forensic, and perspicuous. He was succeeded by the bluff, frank, and honest John Lee. The turn of the renegade Solicitor-General Wedderburne came, and he delivered against the Petition, and especially against Franklin, who had presented it, a vehement harangue that he had long meditated and elaborately prepared. His manner was cold, his voice of the deepest bass, and at every period, pointed with epigrammatic malignity, he struck with his clenched fist the cushion before him, made the table vibrate, and won the enthusiastic admiration of the Lords of the Council, who, not excepting the President, quite forgot all judicial dignity, and applauded the orator. Even those who disapproved of this impolitic speech, were stunned by its brilliant force; and Burke thought that, contrary to what Franklin's countrymen have strongly maintained, and notwithstanding his apparent stoicism, the philosopher's features occasionally gave indications of internal suffering. His correspondence shows much soreness. The wound was never cured. The suit of Manchester velvet was worn once again, when the treaty of alliance between France and the United States was signed. But to such a result the Lords of the Council who voted the Petition scandalous and frivolous, as well as the Government, who eagerly

seized the occasion for dismissing Franklin from his situation at the Post Office, were hopelessly blind.*

The outrage on the philosopher of Pennsylvania, coinciding with the alarming news from America, did not rouse the Legislature from its morbid apathy. A gay Maccaroni like Beauclerk, writing to his friend Lord Charlemont, as well as a grave statesman like Burke, anxious for the future, were equally surprised at the unusual stillness of the political atmosphere. Even the persecution of the printers, which had been such exciting sport in former sessions, had lost its extraordinary fascinations for the lethargic senators ; and Burke's indignant remonstrances on the folly of wasting night after night in this scandalous chase, found a more sympathizing audience.†

But the spirit of tyrannical domination was not deadened in the general languor of the season. On the seventh of March, Lord North brought down a Message from the Throne, informing the House of Commons of the disturbances in Boston, and soliciting the advice and co-operation of Parliament ; and Members, with closed eyes, and with words of mutual encouragement, plunged headlong into the vortex of passion and frenzy

* Priestley's account of this scene is the best. Some writers, having only seen the extract from it in Franklin's Works (vol. iv. pp. 451-455), have referred it to the Monthly Magazine, Nov. 10, 1802. But Priestley's letter was not published until the February of 1803, as may be seen in the first pages of the periodical for that month. Bentham was also present, and has given a narrative of what he witnessed. But it is, like many other of his colloquial statements, extremely inaccurate. Contrary to every other authority, he says that the room was not crowded ; that the business excited little interest ; and even that the Duke of Portland was Lord President. Bentham's Works, vol. x. p. 59. See also Franklin's Works, vol. viii. p. 110.

† Cavendish MSS. : Bibl. Egert., vol. 252, pp. 71-78.

which was to engulf so much blood, so much treasure, and so much glory.

An Address, echoing the royal Message, was of course proposed. The Ministry and the great majority of the House vied with each other in stimulating the popular anger against the Colonists, and in preventing calm reason to produce its soothing effects. Burke however did not shrink from resisting the madness of the people and their rulers, though many of his own friends, including the high-minded Lord John Cavendish, were so much under the influence of the prevailing excitement, as to discourage all opposition to the retributive measures of the Government. He rose, and observed, that before the House came, as was supposed, to a unanimous vote, he would wish all the former speeches and addresses on the subject to be read. He called for them in their order, and made the clerk at the table read them one by one. "Very well," said Burke, after this tranquillizing operation had been performed. "Now turn to the journals, and read the consequent resolutions and historical records of the various resolutions which have been taken." The clerk looked astonished. Members saw the irony of the proposition, and shouted out, "Order! Order!" "I want to know," continued Burke, "what has become of your journals; or do you admit that there are no existing records of measures and resolutions which have followed all your compliments to the Throne and all your denunciations of the Colonies?"

Wedderburne accused him of seeking to criminate every one, of imputing base conduct, and of wasting the time of the House with the string of lengthy epigrams that had just been read.

"I am not," Burke replied, "desirous of adding to

that string of lengthy epigrams. It was not for the purpose of making epigrams on this most melancholy occasion, but for the sake of guiding your conduct, that I have desired you to review it. You have drained the bottle to its last dregs, and yet you are this day still desired to take another draught of the same medicine.” Then entering into the general question of American policy, and the spirit in which all legislation was carried on, he made these memorable observations:—“The temper of this House gives me the most unhappy omens. It is a matter totally indifferent to us whether we take up this important business at the beginning of the session, or whether we take it up now; whether we advise measures of strength, or measures of compliance; whether we advise both, or whether we advise neither: everything or nothing is equally acceptable to the dull, stagnant feeling of the House.” He contrasted this state of mind in men on whose wisdom the fate of empires depended, with the very different feeling that predominated when the Stamp Act was repealed. He reminded his audience of the eight pacific resolutions he had moved four years before, and how he had brought home the disturbances in America to the misconduct of the Administration; and he uttered one final sentence, which, as at once a warning and a prophecy, spoken just before the introduction of the sad measures of the session, resounds in the ears with a strangely solemn and pathetic emphasis. “The honourable gentleman has asked, Should not America belong to this country? If we have equity, wisdom, and justice, it will belong to this country; if we have not, it will not belong to this country.”*

* Cavendish MSS.: Bibl. Egert., vol. 253, pp. 210, 212, 222, 223.

This was now the problem to be solved. The Address was of course adopted. A few days afterwards resolutions were proposed as the foundation of a Bill for the removal of the revenue officers from Boston, and shutting up the port. It was carried through the House with much apparent unanimity. Dowdeswell and Burke, indeed, strongly disapproved of it; but unsupported by their ordinary followers, and with many of the other sections of the Opposition applauding the measure, they could do nothing but vindicate their own consistency, and openly disclaim any share in a coercive plan which carried punishment further than a compensation for the loss of the tea, and confounded the innocent with the guilty.

Burke spoke after the third reading. Defying the malice of the newspapers, which were then filled systematically with abuse of all who questioned the wisdom of this Boston Port Bill, nothing, he said, had ever given him more heartfelt sorrow, nothing had ever given him more real apprehension. One town was in proscription; the rest were in rebellion. It would be better to give orders to the admiral to burn and destroy the place at once, than apply such frantic remedies to such grave disorders. Why did not the frigates that were in the harbour of Boston, prevent the destruction of the tea? Where was the Governor? Where were the King's troops? Was the House sure that the emissaries of the Government, to whom such almost irresponsible power was given, would act better in the emergencies that were being prepared by this Bill? "I cannot think it by any means prudent to be blocking up one town after another. The consequences will be dreadful, I am afraid destructive. You will draw a foreign force upon you, perhaps, at a

time when you least expect it. I will not say where that will end. I will be silent upon that head. But think, I conjure you, of the consequences."

The Ministers had little to say in answer to these earnest representations. Lord North alluded contemptuously to the fear of a foreign enemy taking advantage of these domestic dissensions. Some of the Minister's friends thought fit to accuse Burke of bloodthirstiness for asking why the naval forces of the Crown that were on the spot expressly to maintain order, did not prevent the destruction of the tea. In this wretched sophism they have even been followed by the courtly Adolphus, in his disingenuous narrative of this unhappy measure, which, to the eternal disgrace of the Ministry and Parliament, was carried in extreme haste through both Houses, and received the Royal sanction.*

In the course of the discussions on this Boston Port Bill, Mr. Rose Fuller had expressed a wish that some degree of leniency might be blended with coercion. He was Member for Rye, a sensible man, and, as was then thought, a steady and honest politician. His zeal for the American cause, to Burke's astonishment, afterwards gradually declined;† but as, at his death, it was found that he had been for years receiving a secret pension from Government, this phenomenon was not altogether inexplicable. Shortly after the passing of the Boston Port Bill, he gave an earnest of his desire for conciliation, by moving that the House would be prepared to take into consideration the tax of threepence in the pound on tea imported into the Colonies. The motion was an ordinary one; it had, in almost the same terms,

* History of England from the Accession of George III., by John Adolphus, vol. ii. p. 100.

† Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 8.

been made before ; but the noble display of oratorical genius and political wisdom which it called forth from Burke, has rendered Mr. Rose Fuller and his motion of the nineteenth of April, 1774, ever memorable.

At first the debate excited little interest. The result was of course known ; and after Mr. Fuller had introduced his proposal, and two or three Members had spoken, the House gradually thinned, and the great majority of Members, having long before made up their minds on the question, went away to dinner.

Charles Wolfran Cornwall, the brother-in-law of Jenkinson, continued the debate on the part of the Government. He was a new acquisition of the Ministry. Until very recently he had sat on the Opposition benches, and had been thought devoted to Lord Shelburne. Lord North offered him a Lordship of the Treasury, and at the same time gently intimated that were he to refuse it, the Minister would not know where to look for a suitable person to occupy the post. Cornwall, after the manner of interested politicians, communicated with Lord Shelburne, hoping that his leader would authorize his desertion. Shelburne informed Chatham of the wavering of their common supporter. Chatham wrote in reply to the Earl, that Mr. Cornwall was a very valuable and accredited instrument of real business, that his character was respectable, and his manners and life amiable, and that if the Administration gained him, they would obtain a very worthy and efficient public servant. These elaborate compliments from so illustrious a source were of course intended to be shown to the object of them, that he might see how sensible of his merits the great patriot was, and encourage him to resist the Ministerial temptation. This Lord Shelburne immediately understood,

and acted accordingly. The valuable and accredited instrument of real business professed himself very much flattered at such appreciation ; but he was not deterred by the airy phrases from accepting the substantial realities of a Commissionership of the Treasury. On this evening, to make up for lost time, and to establish himself completely in the good opinions of the Ministers, he, like former renegades, made a violent onslaught on the policy of the Rockingham party, repeating all the commonplaces of the courtiers, and of course attributing all the disturbances in the Colonies to the repeal of the Stamp Act.*

It was this speech which called up Burke. On the narrow ground of the expediency of abolishing the tax on tea, he first grappled with his adversary, and showed from the evidence of the Ministers themselves that the principle of Parliamentary taxation for an American revenue had been abandoned by the existing Government ; and that if a repeal of duties had caused the disorders in the Colonies, Lord North was himself the worst of these repealers, because he was the last, and because, while Lord Rockingham had but repealed one duty, the actual Prime Minister had repealed five. Then, accepting the challenge that Mr. Cornwall had thrown out, he met the enemy boldly in front by entering fully into the history of colonial taxation, and a complete vindication of the Rockingham Ministry. He detailed the circumstances in which taxation by the British legislature had arisen ; the evils which the Stamp Act had produced ; the good which immediately followed the recal ; the difficulties of Lord Rockingham's Ministry ; the revival of the policy of taxation by Chatham's mosaic Government ;

* Chatham Correspondence, vol. iv. pp. 326-336, etc.

the mischievous consequences which this renewed exercise of imperial right had caused; the utter inefficiency of the solitary tea duty as a financial resource; the magnitude of the interests jeopardized by continuing it; and the awful position in which Colonial affairs stood when every remedy appeared only to aggravate the disorder, and the breach between the mother country and her dependencies in the New World was widening every day. In illustration of the general narrative, he paused to depict in the most brilliant colours the characters of Grenville, Chatham, and Charles Townshend, and to point out how their weaknesses and defects had acted with terrible energy in fomenting the grievances and discontents of the Colonies. And in a strain of the loftiest eloquence ever uttered in a popular assembly, he exhorted the House not to persevere in a policy which was at once weak and inflammatory, at once cowardly and sanguinary; but to embrace some system either of war or peace, either of conciliation or of subjugation; to fight for a substantial revenue, or more wisely to return to that happy policy through which the Stamp Act had been repealed, and without which, as Burke declared in his concluding words, there would be no peace for England.

It is from Goldsmith's poem, *Retaliation*, that the popular idea of Burke as an orator and politician has been borrowed. The gentle author of that exquisite little satire had just been carried to his premature grave, and his unfinished poem was as yet in manuscript. To this identical period therefore, if to any, the humorous description of the good Edmund ought more particularly to refer. I have already ventured to express my doubts whether the verses so often quoted, which represent Burke as habitually indulging in refinements while his impatient

audience only thought of dining, and which contain the apparently contradictory affirmations that he gave up to party what was meant for mankind, and was at the same time too fond of the right to pursue the expedient, are really so justly characteristic of Burke as they have been commonly accepted. Less perhaps than of any other great English orator can it justly be said of him, that he was fond of metaphysical subtleties and sophistical distinctions. By comparing with Goldsmith's description this, the first of Burke's great published orations, and considering the circumstances which attended the delivery of it, the reasons for scepticism as to the accuracy of the poet's delineation are certainly not diminished. The demarcations of policy are unmistakably clear and natural; there is not a single argument or distinction which can be called subtle or abstruse. And the force, wisdom, and eloquence of sentence after sentence exciting the admiration of a bitterly adverse majority; idle politicians, interested by the reports of others, crowding into the House from the lobbies and staircases, to listen to the glowing words; loud cries of "Go on! Go on!" as the orator paused, and intimated that he might be tiring gentlemen by his long narrative; Members declaring enthusiastically to each other, that here was the most wonderful man they had ever heard; and the American agents in the gallery being with difficulty restrained from giving unequivocal proofs of their admiration; such are the authentic statements that have come down to us about the reception of a speech opposed to the strongest prejudices of Ministers and their overwhelming host of supporters, and delivered by the man who was at that very time satirically represented as the Dinner-bell of the House of Commons, and at whose

imaginary fate frigid dullness and frothy impertinence have so frequently consoled themselves for the inevitable failure.

But even on this night Burke, as usual, had his foil. Wedderburne undertook to defend Grenville, whom in his opinion the orator had unjustly aspersed in the character he had given in the course of the speech. Some men, it seemed, said the Solicitor-General, wishing to be very severe, were born for government, but Mr. Grenville had been, from what they had heard, particularly unfortunate. His mind had been contracted by the two circumstances of having been bred to a profession, and after he had completed his studies, of having been immediately immersed in the business of office. From the law he had acquired some evil habits and prejudices unknown to those who were happily ignorant under what form of government they lived; and from his initiation into office he had not had the advantages of entering into the fashionable clubs, but had acquired an early intimacy with the first men of the age. "Such, Sir," said the Solicitor-General, sneering, as he thought triumphantly, at Burke, "were the disqualifications under which Mr. Grenville was called forth to the first situations in Administration at a time when ancient prejudices were still respected, and before it was understood that parts were spoiled by application, that ignorance was preferable to knowledge, and that any lively man of imagination and fancy, without practice in office, and without experience, might start up at once a self-taught Minister, and undertake the management of a great country in difficult times."*

This retort was considered very clever and happy.

* Preface to Grenville Papers, vol. i. p. 14.

Wedderburne thought his speech so good, that he took care to write it out himself, and send it next morning to Lord Temple, as Grenville's living representative. Yet this lawyer-like special pleading, which came so glibly from the Solicitor-General's fluent lips, will not alter the verdict of posterity. The character of Grenville, as Burke has drawn it, remains unimpeachable for fidelity and power; and though the author of it could indeed boast of little official experience, he will ever be considered a statesman of an immeasurably superior order to that of the industrious Grenville, looking merely to routine, and his callous advocate, looking merely to his selfish interests.

Burke, in answer to Wedderburne's sneers, said a few contemptuous words. He declared that he had not treated Grenville's memory with disrespect. "But I will never," said he, "break into the tombs and disinter the dead, that as vampires they may be raised to prey upon the virtues of the living."

Fox followed. He had learnt, when Cornwall was appointed to a Lordship of the Treasury, that a new commission had been made out, in which, as Lord North quizzingly intimated, the name of the Honourable Charles James Fox did not appear; and keeping no terms with the Court, he on this day gave his first vote with the Rockingham party. On the same day more tea-chests were being broken open, and others being sent back to their owners by Burke's constituents at New York. On the same day in the following year, because his pacific advice was disdained, and the measures of conciliation he proposed had been disdainfully rejected, the first blood in the Civil War was being shed at Lexington and Concord; and British soldiers, fired at from between hedges, and,

in the midst of a hostile population rising around them, were seen in hasty and ignominious retreat.

It really seemed that the object of the Ministerial policy was to drive the Colonists into rebellion. Feeling confident that the forces of Great Britain could in one short campaign put down all resistance at the point of the bayonet, and encouraged in this sanguine delusion by foolish governors and foolish generals, who, on returning from America, said only what they knew would be pleasing at Court and find them favour in the eyes of their Royal master, the extreme measures of the Ministry appear only consistent with this bloody design. A few days after the rejection of Mr. Rose Fuller's motion, a Bill was brought in which professed to regulate the government of Massachusetts Bay, but which really, without a trial or hearing of the Colonists, deprived them of their chartered privileges, and invested the nomination to all judicial and municipal offices in the hands of the Crown.

The measure was received with much approbation. Elated with such encouragement, Lord North, in rapid succession, introduced other penal Bills against the same Colonists. They were stripped of their judicial rights by an enactment which provided, that in cases of murder or other capital offences committed in aid of the magistracy, the persons under accusation should, at the discretion of the Governor, be sent for trial either to another Colony or to Great Britain. Another measure, evidently taken from the most orthodox repository of tyranny during the reign of Charles I., legalized the quartering of troops on the town of Boston. The plan of misgovernment proposed by the Ministers, with the cordial approval of the King, appeared complete.

On the 2nd of May, the Massachusetts Bill was read a third time. Burke solemnly renewed his protest against the whole and every part of this infatuated policy. His language was even more than ordinarily grave, elevated, and impressive. He had sketched out some of the most important passages of this speech before delivering it ; and an assembly of the great statesmen and legislators of all ages might have listened to him with awe and admiration. He was interrupted at the outset by some jovial Members who had just come from dinner. It was indeed, not as Goldsmith depicted, the resistance of hungry senators as the dinner hour approached, that Burke had most frequently to encounter when he addressed the House ; but rather, as he generally spoke late in the debate, that of the drunken Members, who, leaving table at the summons of the Ministerial whipper-in, and hurrying down to the division, had neither sense nor imagination left, to appreciate the most consummate wisdom or the most brilliant rhetoric. This inglorious obstacle to an earnest orator was at that time more formidable than it is now easy to believe. The convivial habits of the century were so extreme, that it is no exaggeration to say a third of the Members who divided after a long debate, at an advanced period of the night, were not quite sober, and that many of them were in that happy state of optical hallucination in which, on looking at the Chair, they beheld either only a sea of mist, or two Speakers instead of one.

This splendour of Burke's exordium on this night might however have awakened sensuality from its debauch and dissipated the fumes of wine. Rising at once to that noble eminence on which no other orator, either of ancient or modern times, has stood, and from which, to

his far-seeing eye, not only the present seemed clear, but on the distant horizon the future also appeared not indistinctly revealed, he thus loftily addressed the blinded Ministers and their intemperate followers : “ You are now come to the anxious crisis of the important matter before you. The labour of the House for this session is completed, and we are at length in a situation to view the whole system together. Now that you have finished, I wish that you may be able to look upon it with the satisfaction of a wise Creator in his accomplished creature, and to say, with truth and triumph, that you see your work, and that all is good. Whatever the work may be, I see no Sabbath to succeed it. We have finished the work, to commence a long series of long, long labours. We are launching out into a sea to which I can observe no shore, and the atmosphere is lowering upon every quarter.”

He took each Bill separately into consideration. He particularly commented on the one then about to pass, which, while insultingly called a measure of regulation, he declared to be the penal confiscation of charters, the persecution of whole cities and provinces, a sort of execution, either in the first instance or consequentially, of nearly a whole quarter of the globe. “ I do not know,” said he, “ whether it arises from the most degenerate insensibility or from the most magnanimous strain of heroic constancy ; but whatever be the cause, I am beyond measure surprised that you seem to feel no sort of terror at the awfulness of the situation in which you are placed by Providence, or into which you thought proper to intrude yourselves. A whole people culprit ! Nations under accusation ! A tribunal erected for commonwealths ! This is no vulgar idea, and no trivial under-

taking ; it makes me shudder. I confess, in comparison to the magnitude of the situation, I feel myself shrunk to nothing. Next to that tremendous day in which it is revealed that the saints of God shall judge the world, I know nothing that fills my mind with greater apprehension ; and yet I see the matter trifled with as if it were the beaten routine, an ordinary quarter-session, or a paltry course of common gaol-delivery."

It seems scarcely credible, and yet it is a fact, that while uttering such sentences, he was interrupted by the swaggering bacchanalians who, to disconcert him, were rushing in and out of the House. "I find, Sir," said he, indignantly looking to the Speaker, "that I have got my voice, and I shall beat down this noise." He would not be surprised, he said, if England lost her Colonies. They were not treated either with enlarged and substantial justice, which conferred reverence and majesty, or with that violent and rapid course of domineering injustice which subdued the weakness of mankind, and bowed the world before those who inflicted it, as before wicked beings of a superior order. The policy of the Government was even mean and abject in its tyranny. It was that of a nation neither by its virtues nor its faults, qualified for empire. He knew not what was meant by making an example of a whole people. Whom were they attempting to govern in this manner ? They were Englishmen. They were the most unmanageable part of an unmanageable race. They were republicans by religion, and democrats by nature. They did hard works by land ; they lived rough lives by sea ; neither softened by ease nor by luxury, the genial warmth of Court influence had not yet mitigated the rigour of their barbarous love of freedom. Such men

could not be reduced into a state of military servitude. What infatuation, to enforce juries by the Regulating Act of the last session on the miserable inhabitants of Bengal, and by this other Regulating Act to take them away from Englishmen in another hemisphere ! America might not be able to resist openly the forces of this country, but a great many black books and a great many red coats would never be able to govern it.*

The Bill was read a third time and sent up to the Lords, who, receiving it with equal favour, sent down to the Commons another measure which has frequently been considered part and parcel of the same Ministerial scheme of feeble violence and overbearing folly ; but which is in some respects honourably distinguished from that series of malevolent enactments, and which, though hurried through both Houses in the sultry days of June, when all the fashionable people had left town, and the most diligent legislators only remained at their posts, may be considered as one gleam of sunshine, a single omen of better times for a moment relieving the dark prospect of a session that, in Burke's opinion, was the most important and the most disgraceful since a constitutional Government had been permanently established by the Revolution.†

The measure professed to provide for the Government of Quebec, and was concisely called the Quebec Bill. It had two distinct features : by extending the boundaries of the province, it aimed at preventing the expansion of the New England Colonies ; and in proportion

* Fragments of this speech, from Burke's Papers, have been published in the Appendix to his Correspondence, without any intimation to what subject they refer, or in what debate they were spoken. Vol. iv. pp. 407-499. But see Parl. Hist., vol. xvii. p. 1314.

† See Annual Register, 1774, p. 78.

as this jealousy of the descendants of the old Puritans was indicated, kindness was shown to the Roman Catholics of Lower Canada. They were allowed to sit in the new Legislative Council. They were allowed the free exercise of their religion, which was really taken under the guardianship of the State. On the Roman Catholic clergy were conferred all their dues and privileges. In civil cases the French laws, without a jury, were to administer justice ; in criminal, the English laws, and a jury after the English form.

As agent for New York, Burke had to defend the interests of his province, which were directly compromised by the proposed boundary. As an English legislator, attached to English forms of justice, he had to protect the English settlers in Lower Canada, who were treated with much less favour than the Frenchmen, and deprived of their immemorial trial by jury. As a great philosophical statesman, one of whose most cherished purposes was the emancipation of the Catholics of his native land from the yoke of their Protestant countrymen, he had to uphold the clause, which caused much alarm as soon as it became generally known, establishing the Church of Rome in the new province.

These objects he contrived to reconcile, combine, and partially attain. Forgetting all his previous labours in the long session, he threw his whole heart and soul into the work. He would not give up the rights of his province. He told Lord North that if a compromise were not accepted in conformity with his ideas, he, the pertinacious agent for New York, must be heard by counsel at the bar. Two whole days were spent by him in committee, defining the limits of the new province where they touched on the outskirts of his colony, until both

the Minister and the House lost all patience with the indefatigable agent, who however carried his point.

This being settled, he was at liberty to attend to the general policy of the measure. Attacking some of the clauses, which Lord North was obliged to confess had not received due consideration, Burke ridiculed him with so much wit and humour that he kept the House in a roar of laughter from the beginning to the end of his speech. In supporting an important amendment, that in civil process the option of a trial by jury should be left to the contending parties, he found himself again subjected to the interruptions of Members suddenly coming into the House after dinner. But he happily turned the laugh against them, by hoping that, as they had just eaten good English dinners, and had filled their stomachs with good English meat, they would surely be for those good English laws which could alone secure to them the quiet enjoyment of their national sustenance.*

There seems no reason why so equitable a clause should have been opposed. But the Attorney and Solicitor Generals and the Prime Minister spoke against it, and rejected it with all the weight of the Government. The one great ameliorating principle which the Bill contained may however be accepted as an excuse for many shortcomings and some rather disingenuous intentions. Burke, suffering in his health from his arduous and protracted labours, might console himself with the consciousness of one satisfactory triumph over bigoted intolerance, in which, however, neither the English people who applauded the Boston Port Bill and the Massachusetts Charter Act, nor the sturdy New Englanders who asserted their most extreme principles of legislative free-

* Parl. Hist., vol. xvii. p. 1397.

dom, were disposed to join. Had the Bill not been passed in haste, it would never have been passed at all. The old clamour against the Church of Rome was once more resounding, and was thought so likely to have an unfavourable influence at the general election, that even Dr. Johnson exerted his literary powers in trying to convince the constituents who were expected to support the candidates of the Court, that no danger could result from this tolerating principle asserted in Canada by men with whose general policy it was so little in harmony, and by whom its legitimate application at home was afterwards so doggedly resisted.*

* The Patriot, in Johnson's Works, vol. viii. Letter from Burke to the Corresponding Committee of the General Assembly at New York; Works and Correspondence, Appendix, vol. ii.

CHAPTER XXI.

1774-1775.

ATTEMPTS AT CONCILIATION.

PARLIAMENT had sat six sessions. At the prorogation no positive announcement had been made respecting a dissolution ; but that event, from the natural course of time, could not be far distant. In most of the boroughs arrangements for the coming struggle had already been made.

The eyes of many patriots turned to Burke. They had not indeed any adequate means of estimating his great abilities ; for even the great speech he had made on Mr. Rose Fuller's recent motion had not yet been published, and was even scrupulously withheld from the world until the colonial measures of the Government should have come into operation, and their effects been fairly tried on their own unprejudiced merits. But the representations of all who came in contact with Burke in the performance of his Parliamentary duties, distinguished him as without exception the most eminent member of the Opposition, and as the man to whom the hopes of those who were interested in the trade with America, and saw clearly the folly and danger of the Ministerial policy, were attracted as to a common centre. His steady consistency every disinterested individual could appreciate. What he had been when he first won

the applause of the House of Commons in the debates at the time when the Stamp Act was repealed, he still, after being exposed to every temptation from his narrow circumstances, continued to be, when the blood-red meteor of civil war was shooting athwart the darkening heavens.

This summer an acquaintance, the Rev. Dr. Thomas Wilson, was, for the sake of health and recreation, sojourning at Clifton Hotwells, near Bristol. The troubled state of affairs and the expected general election were naturally the constant topics of conversation in the mercantile circles that he visited. On mentioning the name of Burke as that of one who had always opposed with consummate ability the many absurd propositions which had been carried into practice and were being gradually seen in their lamentable results, some of Mr. Wilson's friends caught at his idea, that the intellectual champion of free trade and colonial liberty would be peculiarly a fit and proper person to represent them in Parliament. Keeping the project secret for the moment, two or three of the most eminent merchants desired the friendly clergyman to write immediately to Burke, and get to know what his sentiments on the subject might be. This Dr. Wilson lost no time in doing. The scheme took Burke entirely by surprise, and in his reply he expressed some doubts of its practicability. His admirers in Bristol were however not discouraged, and even contemplated the possibility of defeating both the Government candidates. A brother merchant of the town, Henry Cruger, who had been absent in New York on business, and who had just come home at this time, bringing some papers to Burke from his American constituents, and a letter of introduction to him from some

of the provincial authorites of New York, was fixed upon as a suitable colleague. Cruger came to London, visited Burke at Beaconsfield, was kindly entertained by him, and gave him much valuable information on Colonial affairs.* But the design of contesting Bristol appears to have made but little impression on Burke, and was soon dismissed altogether from his mind, as a hopeless business.

Another electioneering proposal from a different quarter was at the time thought by him likely to be more successful. Some of his friends spoke of setting him up on the Independent interest, against the Court candidates for Westminster. Wilkes had himself first inspired the design, and appeared to embrace it with enthusiasm ; but he soon became diplomatically reserved, as so eminent a patriot, wishing to fill his pockets from the purse of the best bidder, had solid reasons for being. Many persons who admired Burke's genius were cordially ready to give him their support. But still, as in the case of that of Bristol, nothing positive was yet done ; the plan hung in the winds, and with it Burke's Parliamentary hopes were somewhat uncomfortably oscillating to and fro.

Coming up to town on this or some other business one Thursday afternoon, he had the next day a few hours to spare, and called on Barry. For two years Dr. Brocklesby, a kind physician, the common friend of Johnson and Burke, and one of Abraham Shackleton's pupils at Ballitore, had been desirous of having Burke's portrait,

* See a Letter from Burke to the Committee of Correspondence at New York. It was recently found in the archives at New York, and copied by Mr. Bancroft for Lord Fitzwilliam. See Works and Correspondence : Appendix, vol. ii.

and as Barry was an Irish genius in which they both took much interest, he wished the young artist to paint the picture. For two years Burke had, with this object, frequently presented himself at the painter's door ; but always found him engaged. He was equally unfortunate on this occasion. Being unexpectedly detained in town until half-past four on the following Saturday, he happened to meet with Dr. Brocklesby, who again spoke about the portrait. As Burke had a few hours to spare, he again in the morning went to Barry's studio, and again met with the same unfortunate reception.

This was sufficiently provoking. A little reflection might have taught the impracticable artist that it was a compliment to employ him to paint the portrait at all, and that, whatever his engagements might be, his first duty was to comply with the wishes of the great man who had been to him the most generous of benefactors. Burke wrote him a ceremonious letter, in which he gravely apologized for the frequency and impropriety of his visits, and excused himself for giving so eminent an artist so much trouble, on the ground that he was only seeking to gratify the wishes of an old friend. In all this grave politeness, the irony was unmistakable. " You," said Burke, " who know the value of friendship and the duties of it, I dare say will have the goodness to excuse me on that plea."

Barry felt the satirical keenness of this decorous apology. But he felt it after his own manner. Instead of at once acknowledging that he had acted wrongly, and promising for the future to conform, as much as might be in his power, to his kind friend's convenience, he professed himself hurt ; assumed the tone and air of

an injured person ; refused to undertake the portrait unless Burke would give the same notice of the times for sitting which he well knew that all other artists required ; and accused him of wishing to pick a quarrel. Burke had returned to Beaconsfield when he received this strange communication. He replied, without anger, and in the same dignified style of his former remonstrance. He assured Barry that he thought much too highly of his knowledge in supposing that he well knew similar terms were stipulated by all other artists. He had been painted five times, twice in miniature, and three times largely, and all these portraits had been executed in his spare hours, whenever he found himself unexpectedly at leisure from pursuits which might seem insignificant to others, but which, to himself at least, were of some importance. A portrait of him was now being painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds for Mr. Thrale, in that manner, and in that manner only. Noticing the insinuations Barry had thrown out about his wishing to quarrel, and that a picture was a miserable subject for it, he admirably added, with his habitual moral philosophy, “I do not wish to quarrel with you, Mr. Barry ; I do not quarrel with my friends. But if any one should have a difference with a painter, some conduct relative to a picture is as probable a matter for it as any other.” That he had no disposition to quarrel, he soon showed, even to the irascible artist’s satisfaction. Though from this time he always treated Barry with reserved politeness, and though the unhappy disposition of the painter shut him out from the inner circle of Burke’s friends, they still remained on amicable terms, and the portrait was duly painted.

On entering the artist’s room one morning, he found

him engaged on a small cabinet picture. Burke asked him what he was doing. "Only a mere trifle," said Barry. "Young Mercury inventing the lyre by accidentally finding a tortoise-shell at break of day on the sea-shore." Burke stood contemplating this fine classical delineation, which was considered one of the sweetest and most beautiful creations of Barry's genius, and of which a rare engraving may still be found by the curious. At the break of day Mercury finds on the sea-shore a tortoise-shell. On touching the withered filaments of the inside, they give forth a note of harmony. He sits down, rejoicing in his discovery. Cupid comes behind him, and gives him the string of a bow. Thus was symbolized Love, purified and elevated by Music. "Ay," exclaimed Burke, "this is the fruits of early rising,—there is the industrious boy. I will give you a companion for it. Paint Narcissus wasting his day in looking at himself in a fountain,—there is the idle boy!" Barry caught at the idea. The two pictures were finished, and thought to be two admirable companions.*

The artist's mind was full of great schemes. He never thought of subjecting it to any discipline; the painting of portraits was his aversion, from which his genius gladly took refuge in the loftiest dreams and the most abstruse matters of his art. As a natural consequence of his ambitious visions, what he hastily but gloriously imagined, he seldom carefully and elaborately finished. His noblest ideas were frequently marred in execution. He delighted to write on the disputed and theoretical questions of painting; and the same hurry, the same impetuosity, and the same love of quarrelling

* Barry's Life and Works, vol. i. p. 239.

with all who came in contact with him, may be seen in his literary compositions. He was at this time composing *An Enquiry into the Real and Imaginary Obstructions to the Acquisition of the Arts in England*, in which there were many just thoughts and much good criticism. But there were also much intemperance of manner, much sneering and cavilling against his brother artists, a want of method, and a disdain of all the ordinary rules of composition. These defects, in a letter written in the third person, Burke candidly pointed out when he read an early presentation copy of the book. In the delicate irony of his two former letters, he commented on Barry's inveterate propensity of assailing his contemporaries, and intimated that the world would like much better to be entertained with the pictures of artists, than to be troubled with their disputes. "There are," wrote Burke, "a few parts of the work which Mr. Burke could not have understood, if he had not been previously acquainted by some gentlemen to whom Mr. Barry had explained them, that they were allusions to certain matters agitated among artists, and satires upon some of them. Whatever merit there may be in these reflections, the style of that part which most abounds with them is by no means so lively, elegant, clear, or liberal as the rest."*

Burke was indeed little inclined to approve of such attacks. Professing a most unlearned admiration for the art of painting, he took the greatest interest in it; and nearly all the eminent painters of the time had reason to regard him as their friend. A school of British artists was now rising up that promised great things. Barry had given indications of a genius for historical painting

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 10.

which, under proper guidance, would have made him rank with the greatest painters of past ages. Benjamin West, from the American back-woods, where he had studied Nature under the rudest and grandest forms, was royally patronized in England, and could also boast, with others, of an intimacy with Burke. Indeed, so confidential did their intercourse appear, that Mr. West was surprised that the statesman had any reserve with him at all; that he did not confide to him a minute history of his private life from his birth downwards; and because he did not do so, the painter strangely enough thought that Mr. Burke must have something to conceal. Sir Joshua Reynolds, who was however an older and closer friend of Burke than even Mr. West, who was regarded as one of the family at Beaconsfield, and familiarly spoken of among its members as “our Knight,” and who in his will constituted Burke his executor, and entrusted to him the management of his whole property, would have been somewhat astonished had Mr. West communicated to him his absurd suspicions. Their common friend, Dr. Johnson, and the whole Club at the Turk’s Head, would have been equally surprised at any individual who, while enjoying the privileges of such an acquaintanceship, could make this intimacy itself, of which any man had reason to be proud, the foundation for such mysterious imputations.

Johnson, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Thrale, spent some days this autumn with Burke at Beaconsfield. To the Doctor his host appeared a model of worldly prosperity and contented genius. Everything was done by Burke and his wife to make the old man happy. Fascinated by what he saw, the splendid mansion, the extensive grounds, the air of comfort and elegance which per-

vaded the statesman's residence, the peace of his home, the respectful admiration of his relatives, and his own serene cheerfulness, which appeared under all circumstances invariable, Johnson, in a Latin quotation, intimated, not deprecatingly, but pensively, that he did not envy, but admired.

Yet at this very time Burke was really far from being at his ease. His mind was so full of care and anxiety both for his friends and on his own account, that when alone he found himself giving way to fits of melancholy, to such as at no other period was he ever subject. None of the guests who met at his table or walked with him over his fields, nor even they who were united to him by the closest ties of blood, were aware of this mental depression. He made Lord Rockingham his only confidant in griefs which no other person could so fully share.

Mistrusting the effects of the American measures of the session, and wishing to steal a march on the Opposition, the Ministers had resolved at once to dissolve Parliament. When the announcement appeared in the Gazette, the Rockingham party were entirely unprepared for action. Sir George Savile had spoken of retiring altogether from Parliament, and all the Marquis's influence was required to prevail upon him to abandon this resolution. Dowdeswell, the nominal leader of the party, had been obliged to abandon his post through illness in the midst of the last session. His health had not improved during the autumn; he had broken a bloodvessel, and was advised to go abroad for a change of climate, as his only chance of recovery. Though so eminent a Worcestershire Magistrate, a Member of Parliament for twenty years, a Chancellor of the Exchequer,

and a leading politician of the House of Commons, he, like many other English gentlemen of that age, had never been on the sea. Burke had little hopes of his friend's recovery, and the event justified his prognostication. The sturdy form of the honest magistrate no more appeared on the Opposition benches. No more was his plain statement of facts to form a convenient relief to his friend's imaginative oratory, or constitute what Burke had recently called it, a solid English joint of meat, to which Lord North's wit was the agreeable dessert.*

In addition to these misfortunes, which he shared with other members of the party, Burke had also more personal mortifications. As Lord Verney's affairs were still very much embarrassed, it was necessary that he should seek out some moneyed candidates for the two boroughs from which he had hitherto very disinterestedly sent both Edmund and William Burke to Parliament. His own election for the county of Buckinghamshire was threatened; and should the event be adverse to him, he might even require one of these seats himself. Lord Verney had hitherto been a very quiet but a very consistent supporter of Lord Rockingham; grateful for past kindnesses, Burke was far from blaming him for not continuing them; and he felt more for the misfortunes of his friend than for his own. There was every prospect of William Burke not being returned at all. Though he had remained faithfully attached to the Rockingham party, had even sacrificed an important place to his political principles, had always encouraged his illustrious kinsman to act the upright and resolute part he had played against the Court, and appears as a politician to

* *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xvii. p. 1061.

have evinced much sound judgment and sterling integrity, still he had not shown those commanding abilities which would render his absence noticed in the House of Commons. A seat in Parliament was however more indispensable to him than to Edmund, whose genius secured him eminence in speculative as well as active life. Burke, contemplating the contingency of William Burke not being re-elected, felt much pain at the idea of the devoted friend to whom he owned his own seat in the House of Commons being compelled to wait for him in the lobby.*

His own Parliamentary prospects, notwithstanding the favourable auspices of the summer, were scarcely brighter. Nothing more had been heard from Bristol. At Westminster, whither his hopes more directly tended, there were already many candidates in the field. He went up to town to examine the ground, and found the chances of success most unfavourable. On sending a friend to consult Wilkes, he professed to have quite forgotten that anything had passed on the subject. When he was reminded that he had himself first mooted the design, he replied that he understood Mr. Burke would not be supported by his great Whig friends, the Dukes of Portland and Devonshire; and that Lord Mahon, who was to be Lord Chatham's son-in-law, and who had, as Wilkes had been told, just inherited fifty thousand pounds from a Spanish nobleman, a piece of information which, though erroneous, had evidently made a great impression on the susceptible patriot, was in all respects a suitable candidate for the independent electors of Westminster. In that quarter, then, all was over; and no ray of hope shone in any other. With adver-

* Correspondence, vol. i. p. 481.

tisements from different candidates appearing every day in the newspapers, and all England in its periodical state of characteristic excitement, Burke was almost in despair, and hinted even to Lord Rockingham the possibility of his retiring altogether from Parliament.*

This letter produced on the Marquis the effect probably intended. He at once placed his own borough of Malton at the service of his ablest and most faithful follower, and thus rendered his return to the new Parliament a moral certainty. It was necessary however to comply with forms, though the result was in fact so little doubtful. Burke had to set out in all haste for Yorkshire.

“Farewell, my dear Sir, and remember that I wish you all the success that ought to be wished you, that can possibly be wished you, indeed—by an honest man,” Johnson is reported to have said, as his Whig friend took his leave.† The first incident of the electioneering expedition was not a good omen of this success. Burke was stopped by two highwaymen on Finchley Common. He lost ten guineas, and his servant a metal watch. This was however his only mishap on this eventful journey.‡ Of all the candidates at the general election, he was at first the most desponding; of them all he was the most successful; and of them all he most deserved success.

The election at Bristol had begun. The two old Members, Lord Clare and Mr. Brickdale, stood on the Government, or, as it was then again about to be called, the Tory, interest, and Cruger was the only candidate on the side of the Opposition. Finding the probability

* Correspondence, vol. i. p. 481.

† Mrs. Piozzi’s Anecdotes. ‡ Correspondence, vol. i. p. 495.

of his election become more and more unlikely, Lord Clare, on the second day of the poll, retired from the contest. The gentlemen who had at first been consulted by Dr. Wilson, immediately set up Burke, and some of them hastened at once to London, to inform him of the step they had taken. He had however gone to Malton. While his brother hurried down to the scene of the contest, the friendly Bristol gentlemen followed Burke into Yorkshire, and arrived at Malton just after the election, when he and some of his new constituents were sitting down to dinner. He at once informed his Yorkshire friends of the requisition, and they with one voice urged him, on public grounds, not to neglect, at a time when great commercial interests were at stake, the opportunity of representing so eminent a commercial constituency. Taking post-horses that same evening, he was on his way to Bristol. He was in his chaise both night and day; he stopped nowhere; he took no rest; and it was thought that he had performed a prodigious feat of locomotion when, by leaving Malton at six o'clock on the Tuesday evening, and arriving at Bristol at two o'clock on the Thursday afternoon, he had travelled two hundred and seventy miles in forty-four hours.*

He drove at once to the house of the Mayor. Not meeting with that official at home, he went thence to the Guildhall, the scene of the election, then crowded with voters, and of course also full of excitement and tumult. Burke mounted the hustings immediately, bowed to the candidates, sheriffs, and electors, and then, after sitting down for a few moments to repose himself and collect his thoughts, he stood forward and addressed the

* Preface to *Speeches at Bristol, 1774.* Letter to Mrs. French. Correspondence, vol. i. p. 498.

assembled multitude in a speech which is singularly in contrast with the ordinary oratory of contested elections. Had he been writing a philosophical treatise, he could not have been more guarded in his expressions, or shunned with more instinctive dislike the usual extreme phrases of a popular candidate. He would not raise expectations by great promises. He would engage for nothing but that, without lightly abandoning his former opinions, every great Colonial question should receive his honest and impartial consideration. He was in favour of American freedom, but only so far as it could be reconciled with the just, wise, and constitutional superiority of Great Britain. The prosperity of England arose from her liberty and her commerce, which were the foundations of her Constitution; but the only liberty he meant was a liberty inseparably connected with virtue and order, which adhered to good and steady government as its substance and vital principle, and without which neither liberty nor commerce could exist at all. Liberal electors in the midst of a contest are however seldom dispassionate logicians. Burke was, throughout his speech, applauded most lustily; and on his first appearance he gave general satisfaction.

The poll had been open six days. But six days was a short period in the elections under the old system. The whole kingdom was ransacked for freemen, and brought at a great expense to Bristol. Every day Burke had not only to canvass the electors, but to stand on the hustings and thank those who gave him their votes. His good temper and quiet demeanour were remarkable. English life, as seen in some of its most salient features in one of the greatest towns, and with the inhabitants retaining in a greater portion than most others the tra-

ditional habits and primitive manners of the past, was displayed before him; and the philosopher still so much predominated over the party politician, that he looked more like a calm spectator than an interested candidate.

While canvassing one day, he entered a mean house of one of the freemen. The elector was not at home; but before his wife a large Bible was lying open on the table, and she appeared to have been interrupted in her reading by the entrance of the candidate and his friends. Burke glanced over the page, and at once comprehended the situation. The piety of the poor ever had his most sincere respect; the remembrance of the earnest devotion he had witnessed at Ballitore was never effaced from his mind; it may be, too, that he felt at once a keen sense of the nothingness of the great political contest in the city, where the passions of all the townspeople were inflamed and he was himself one of the most prominent actors. He said gravely to the poor woman, "I called, Madam, to solicit the favour of your husband's vote and interest in the present election. You, I perceive," pointing to the Bible, "are making your calling and election sure."

His success in Bristol was however every day becoming more certain. On the third of November he was declared duly elected by a majority of 251. The poll had been open for a month, and the Whigs had carried both candidates. Mr. Brickdale, their defeated opponent, threatened to petition; but he had himself first polled the class of freemen to whom he now objected, and only complained because he could not get more of the body.

Cruzer, as having the larger majority, was the first of the two Members who returned thanks after the de-

claration. He was a plain merchant, without much tact ; but he was not the mere “ditto to Mr. Burke,” which, from an anecdote which has, rightly or wrongly, been told of him, he has generally been considered. In fact, the “I say ditto to Mr. Burke,” which it has been said Cruger ludicrously affirmed after one of the great orator’s glowing speeches, was a phrase which an honest merchant, who had been much in America, might naturally employ ; for it is a colloquial expression peculiar to the Colonies, and the word, ditto, in the same sense, is even now a Yankeeism in daily use among millions of people. Proud of his newly acquired dignity as Member for Bristol, Cruger, in his speech, was all gratitude to his fellow-townsmen, among whom he had been born and bred. He could not however please everybody, and frankly confessing that “the topic of instructions” had occasioned much uneasiness in this city, declared his willingness to obey implicitly the commands of his constituents.

The doctrine that a Member of Parliament was a mere delegate of the electors, was then daily spreading among the extreme friends of freedom. As Burke, in 1769, had ridiculed it when Sir Joseph Mawbey and his friends first introduced it into the representative assembly, so he now, in this season of joy and excitement, boldly opposed the prejudices of the electors who had given him their votes, and on the hustings, as in the House of Commons, set his face resolutely against this growing practice. Such an exhibition of independence was then novel, and might well make the electors of Bristol stare with astonishment, and ask each other what kind of man this was, who dared in such a place and at such a time to hold such language, and administer to

them such a rebuke. Regretting that his colleague in the representation had thrown out this topic when there was so little time to discuss it, he frankly told his friends that they had now made him, not a Member of Bristol, but a Member of Parliament, charged with the superintendence of the various multiform and intricate affairs of a great Empire ; that, while paying every deference to the desires of his constituents, a representative worthy of them owed them his judgment as well as his vote ; and that he betrayed them instead of serving them, if he sacrificed the dictates of his conscience and understanding to their momentary opinions. Again the philosopher predominated over the party politician. It surely, after this lesson to candidates and electors, could not be justly asserted that he, of all men, was advocating at this season such popular ideas of freedom as it became infamy in him at a later period to abandon.*

His electioneering fatigues were not yet over. Before he could return homewards, he had a round of visits to make to all his friends ; he had to give dinners to the electors and to his committee ; he had to encourage the lukewarm ; and to pay little attentions to some defeated opponents who were willing to be reconciled. His brother Richard was the very man to assist him in this kind of work. As the joyous chairman at many dinners, as the good-natured gentleman who had a cheerful look and a kind word for every one, as the anxious friend who earnestly inquired after all the wives and children of the freemen, Dick's achievements were quite extraordinary, and materially contributed to the graver Edmund's triumph. Such proceedings were not much to the new

* See his own remarks, in 1791, on this incident of his political life, in the *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*.

Member's taste.. He looked forward gladly to the time when he could quietly settle down once more at Beaconsfield, and, under the affectionate care of her whom he loved so well, allow the fever of this excitement to subside, resume his quiet habits, and regain his mental composure.

On his way homeward he paid one visit, which must have strangely struck him as a contrast to all the heat and bustle he had just left behind him at Bristol. His son Richard, having returned from France, had commenced the first term of his studies at Christ Church, Oxford. There Burke, amid the quiet cloisters and gardens, spent one afternoon and the next morning with Richard and some of his young college friends; and experienced the exquisite gratification, as another eminent man with a similar generosity of heart and soul records it to be, of sitting for the first time at his own child's board.*

From Oxford he rode over to Beaconsfield, reaching home in time for dinner, and, much to Mrs. Burke's tender distress, bringing with him a severe cold as the consequence of his electioneering campaign in November. She too had been staying, during the absence of her husband, at their town house in the Broad Sanctuary. One night thieves broke in, but were discovered before they could carry off anything valuable. Mrs. Burke heard the noise, but, as the wife of so active a politician, being used to receive expresses at all hours, and expecting one from Bristol, she was not frightened, and only learned the real cause of the disturbance when all reason for alarm was over.†

His friends were of course delighted at his success.

* Sir Walter Scott's Diary, Nov. 21, 1826.

† Correspondence, vol. i. p. 499.

Without solicitation, and without any cost to himself, he had been chosen Member for one of the most influential constituencies in the kingdom. There was joy at Sir Joshua's. There was joy at the good Dr. Nugent's, in Suffolk Street. There was joy at the Club. William Burke had contested Haslemere, and though defeated on the poll, hoping to succeed in a petition to Parliament, shared fully in the common exultation.

Seeing his own happiness reflected in the faces of all his friends, Burke was not the same man he had recently been, when he wrote in such a desponding tone to Lord Rockingham. He was now all hope and energy, eager for work, and determined to persevere. He exhorted the Marquis to decide on some plan for the coming session; and, with the news from America every day becoming more appalling, he plainly intimated that, in his opinion, the most active measures would be the best. There being no sign of improvement in Dowdeswell's health, it was understood that Lord John Cavendish was ostensibly to lead the party in the House of Commons; for, in such an aristocratic assembly, the greatest of orators and philosophers, being still a mere plebeian, was even then not thought the fittest person to appear openly at the head of the Opposition. A country gentleman with a large landed estate, a lord, or the son of a great Whig lord, was of course indispensable, even though he might with difficulty be induced to sacrifice some portion of his winter's fox-hunting for the great cause of America and of England. But whoever might ostensibly be put before him, Burke was, and would continue to be, the real leader of the Rockingham party in the House of Commons.

What he had foretold at the close of the last session

had come to pass. No Sabbath had succeeded to the great Ministerial labours for American subjugation. Every penal measure, as it arrived in the Colonies, only aroused a corresponding spirit of resistance among the people it was intended to terrify. A printed copy of the Boston Port Bill, in some places edged with black, was sent from colony to colony, from town to town, and awoke, as the torch of the Furies, the flames of a general conflagration. The day of shutting up the port was kept as a day of mourning. Bells tolled; the ships in the different harbours hung their colours half-mast high. The spirit of the town, after the Custom-house had been closed, with grass growing in the streets and the wharves deserted, was still unsubdued. The merchants of Salem, whither the revenue officers of Boston had been removed, unanimously refused to profit by this oppression. An effect exactly contrary to what the Ministers had anticipated was produced by their violent measures. They combined, instead of separating the provinces. Virginia again, as formerly, was the first to come to the aid of her sister colony; the others followed her example, and adopted her suggestions. Resolutions for the suspension of all commerce with England until the wrongs of Boston should be redressed, were everywhere passed. A General Congress was proposed; and on Monday, the fifth of September, the deputies from twelve colonies, embracing a mighty continent from Nova Scotia to Georgia, met at Philadelphia. They formally approved of the resistance of the Bostonians to the oppressive Act of the British Parliament. They promulgated a Declaration of Rights. They petitioned the King. They memorialized the people of Great Britain. They wrote a letter to General Gage, the new Governor of Massa-

chusetts, strongly condemning his conduct, and requesting him to discontinue the fortifications he was building on the narrow isthmus called Boston Neck, which connected the town with the mainland.

This miserable Governor had, as a military man, spoken confidently to his Sovereign of reducing all America to submission with five regiments. His proceedings were but too consistent with his absurd declaration. By issuing proclamations which attributed treason to all who resisted his authority, by seizing the cannon and military stores of the province, and by encamping his troops about the isthmus, as though Boston were already in a state of siege, he more than ever exasperated the Colonists, and acted as though civil war already existed. What was but too probable, he made immediate and inevitable. In retaliation, some of his own cannon and straw were carried off; and when the General Congress broke up, and an unauthorized Provincial Assembly of Massachusetts defied the Governor, an appeal to the sword was evidently at hand.

The new Parliament opened on the twenty-ninth of November, under the most gloomy auspices. The Speech from the Throne alluded to the resistance and disobedience of the Province of Massachusetts Bay, in terms which were considered an official acknowledgment that a rebellion had actually begun. Nor did the explanations of Ministers, in their speeches before the Christmas holidays, qualify these alarming assertions. Bad as the condition of affairs was, Lord North and his colleagues seemed anxious to represent it as worse. The first business of the new Parliament being, of course, merely formal, the apathy which still prevailed out-of-doors on the subject of America increased rather than diminished.

But in the House of Lords, the Marquis of Rockingham not only moved an amendment on the Address, but took the unusual step of protesting against its rejection. A similar amendment was also moved in the Commons, and the opposition was warm and animated. As Burke had, at the close of the last session, prophesied against the measures against America in the most impassioned strain of noble eloquence, so he now drew a most pathetic picture of the difference between the state of the British dominions when George III. opened his first Parliament and that which was inaugurating the third. The new Members, he said, were spared the consciousness of this painful contrast; but the aged Israelites wept at the view of the second temple. What a falling off was there! and how the sun of their meridian glory was setting in clouds, tempests, and storms, in darkness and the shadow of death! Recalling the triumphs he had formerly chronicled, he depicted England, at the accession of his Majesty, as combining all the trophies of war with all the blessings of peace; the rugged field of glory buried under the exuberance of a luxuriant harvest; the olive engrafted on the laurel; arms and arts embracing each other; the messengers of victory from every quarter of the globe meeting the convoys of commerce issuing from every port, and announcing one triumph while they prepared another; the ocean as safe for navigation as the Thames. Such was then the harmony and concord of the Empire. "But now," exclaimed the orator, "while our enemies look on and rejoice, we are tearing to pieces this beautiful structure! The demon of discord walks abroad; a spirit of blindness and delusion prevails; we are preparing to mangle our own flesh, in order to cut to pieces the bonds of our union; and we

begin with the destruction of our commerce as a preliminary to civil slaughter;—and thus opens this third Parliament!”*

These words now seem as grave and impressive as those of an inspired prophet denouncing swift and inevitable doom. They were received as the ravings of a mad Cassandra in opposition; and the Address to the Throne, pledging the House to all the measures and passions of the last Parliament, was carried by a majority of nearly two hundred. Gratifying the wishes of the Court, and voting doggedly with the Ministers, the Members, composing the new House, shut their ears to the forebodings of the eloquent tongue that spoke of dismemberment, woe, and ruin.

As the Royal Speech breathed nothing but war, it was at least to be expected that the actions of the Government would be in a corresponding tone. But an incomprehensible irresolution, ominous of the manner in which hostile operations would be conducted by such men, was shown by the Ministers before the Christmas recess. With what they affirmed to be a rebellion in America, they brought forward their estimates on a peace establishment. The naval forces, instead of being increased, were actually reduced by four thousand men. The land tax was maintained at three shillings in the pound. Lord North seldom appeared in the House of Commons; and when he did speak, he seemed reserved and embarrassed. No papers were laid before Parliament; no policy, either of peace or war, had been adopted. Reports were spread abroad that the Prime Minister was overruled in the closet, and thwarted by the King’s friends; that he was most reluctant to engage

* Appendix to Correspondence, vol. iv. p. 468.

in the contest which they were so eager to begin ; and that, faltering at every step, he still blindly trusted to the chapter of accidents. But the chapter of accidents, Burke gravely told him, was contained in a book which had the beginning and the end torn out.*

In the last debate before the recess, Burke also, in a marvellous speech of wit and railly, accused the Ministers of blundering incompetence. He depicted the gallant General Gage as at once besieging and besieged ; of having had cannon sent to him, but which he had allowed to be stolen from him ; of making reprisals on the enemy, and of having his own straw burnt, and his bricks and mortar destroyed. The army was at once an army entrenched and an army of observation. Sir William Meredith rose and solemnly reprehended Burke for being desirous of bloodshed. He blamed the Declaratory Act for all the prevailing disturbances, and asserted that General Gage's army had been of the greatest use in protecting the property of the merchants, in being an asylum for the magistrates, and in blocking up the harbour.

Sir William was now Burke's constant butt, and the white wand of the Controller of the Household during the last session and the one now in progress, his fertile subject for ridiculous similes and fanciful allusions. In reply, he made the House roar with laughter both at Sir William and at General Gage. He had heard of an asylum for orphans, he had heard of an asylum for thieves, and he had heard of an asylum for loose women, but never before of an asylum for magistrates. The army, it appeared, protected trade in a place where all commerce was prohibited by law. As for the block-

* *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xviii. p. 57.

ing up of the harbour, this was the first time that the world had seen an army, instead of a fleet, blockading a port. At the entrance of Dublin harbour there was a north and south bull; but such a bull as this, even as a native of Ireland, he had never known.

Parliament adjourned. Members went into the country to enjoy their Christmas cheer, and many a fireside was enlivened by the relation of Burke's inimitable ridicule of Sir William Meredith and General Gage. Conway was in Paris at the time. Walpole, in writing to him on passing events, mentioned the brilliant manner in which the orator had shone on that occasion, as really amazing; and it would have somewhat surprised Dr. Johnson, who could never be made to understand that Burke possessed wit at all.*

During these Christmas holidays Burke received, among other documents relating to America, an important letter from an old acquaintance, General Charles Lee.

This man was one of the most extraordinary characters of the age. Since the deaths of Charles the Twelfth of Sweden, and Charles Viscount Mordaunt, Earl of Peterborough, no more fiery soldier had been seen on the earth. The son of a colonel of dragoons, Lee had been born and cradled amid arms. He had obtained a commission when quite a boy. He had in his youth commanded a company of Grenadiers in America during the war against the French, and acquired his first hard experiences of active service as the associate of Mohawk warriors, with whom he smoked the calumet of friendship, and who admitted him as an adopted son into

* Walpole's *Collected Letters*, vol. v. p. 400. *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xviii. p. 73.

one of their tribes. The Indians called him Boiling Water. The name not inaptly described his disposition. He lived at high pressure. At Ticonderoga, he was struck down by a musket-ball. At the siege of Fort Niagara, while at the head of his tribe of Indians, two bullets passed through his hat, and even touched his hair. After seeing the conquest of Canada accomplished by the surrender of Montreal, he returned into Europe, and went with Burgoyne to the defence of Portugal. There he was as much at home, while wading through rivers at night, rushing by daybreak with fixed bayonets into the enemy's camp, and surprising old Moorish castles on the Tagus, as he had been when campaigning with his Mohawks in the forests of the New World. Despairing of promotion in England, where he offended the Ministry by his pen, that was ever as ready and as impetuous as his sword, he afterwards set off for Poland, was honoured on his way with some long interviews with the King of Prussia, and was made aide-de-camp to the new Polish sovereign Stanislaus Augustus. The people of Warsaw were turbulent, the troops disorderly, and Lee was obliged to sleep with pistols under his pillow. But even this was not excitement enough. He determined to go with the Polish Ambassador to Constantinople. Finding that the diplomatist did not travel fast enough for him, he left him behind on the road, proceeded adventurously and expeditiously alone, and was nearly starved to death in crossing the Balkan. When he arrived at the city of the Sultan, there happened a dreadful earthquake, and he was nearly buried under the ruins of his house. Soon being again in England, he found the Rockingham Ministry favourable to his pretensions. He became ac-

quainted with Burke, and wrote most enthusiastically to his friend, the King of Poland, about the great success the young Irishman had gained in his first Parliamentary session. Three years afterwards, on the war breaking out between Russia and Turkey, Lee thought he saw his opportunity, joined the Russian army as it was marching into Moldavia, and was in the thickest of the fight, when a squadron of hussars and Cossacks was cut to pieces in a ravine near Chotzim. Suffering from the remains of fever, his joints racked by rheumatism, and his feet sometimes in agony with gout, he then travelled over the south of Europe, grumbling, quarrelling, duelling wherever he went. His favourite amusement in his hours of leisure was to write anonymous letters in the English newspapers, abusing the Ministers who would not employ him ; and thus, among others, the Letters of Junius were ascribed to Lee. Returning to the scene of his former campaigns, he found the Americans bitterly discontented with England, and preparing to resist the exercise of the right of taxation by force of arms. Sanguine, elated, gratified with the respect with which the simple Colonists received a soldier who had been regularly trained, and had taken an active part in so many European wars, he everywhere encouraged them to oppose the mother country, and it was reported that he was ready to put himself at their head. The Ministry, justly considering Lee as a man capable of the most daring designs, warned General Gage to keep an eye on this impetuous soldier of fortune, whose presence was, like that of the carrion birds of prey, indeed a sign of blood and death.*

In reply to a letter which Burke had addressed to him immediately after the scene at the Privy Council ten

* Lee's Life, 1792. Sparks' Life of General Lee.

months before, Lee wrote in his usually exalted and fervid strain. The Young Democracy was to him as the young eagle soaring with unblenched eyes in the face of the morning sun. In the old world everything appeared to him encrusted and effete; in the new, all was radiant and bright with promise. Fathers calling their children round their beds of death, and making them promise to be true to the cause of freedom; the people of Boston offering never to enter their town again until their rights and liberties should be restored; the peasants no longer slovenly in their air, or slouching in their gaits as he had seen them years before, but standing up erect, smart, and soldier-like at the approach of tyranny; the courage, moderation, and fitness everywhere displayed among the Colonists, and the ignorance, infatuation, and incompetence of the governing clique from whom the Court and Ministry at home received their information; all these signs seemed to Lee to portend that the people of New England would form irresistible conquering armies, and that if the scheme of reducing them to obedience by the strong hand was persevered in, England would burn her own fingers, and America be severed from the Empire.* He denied that he had any intention of undertaking such an important office as the leadership of the American armies. But had the first place been offered him, he would certainly not have refused it, for he very shortly afterwards became a most insubordinate second in command.

Lee's letter could not but make Burke look even more seriously than ever on the conflict to which the rulers of England were madly rushing. A little while before, the repeal of an insignificant duty on tea would have restored

* Correspondence, vol. i. p. 508.

harmony between two continents, but now parent and child were about to imbrue their hands in each other's blood. It was at this time that he sent to press his speech on Mr. Rose Fuller's motion for that repeal, and gave to all who read it an unexpected and unaccustomed pleasure. Political eloquence of the highest class was beheld for the first time in all its beauty and perfection as the report of a speech made in Parliament on a great subject of immediate and engrossing interest. Young men at college, philosophers in their studies, and the better class of politicians of the platform, all became more than ever attracted to Burke; and as a consummate master of eloquence, and as the champion of enlightened principles in the Senate, he began to exert a mighty influence over the minds of the advancing generation.*

But the cares of the statesman clouded the triumph of the orator. The merchants were thoroughly alarmed. Great meetings, in which London and Bristol took the lead, were held in all the commercial towns of the kingdom, and petitions adverse to the course the Government was pursuing were sent for presentation to Parliament. A draught of one of the petitions from Bristol Burke had sent down himself, and he and Cruger had each to bring one from their constituents to the notice of the House of Commons, as soon as it met, in the January of 1775.

The Ministers at once laid the American papers before Parliament. They fixed the 26th of the same month for taking them into consideration in a committee of the whole House; and it was not unnaturally supposed that the petitions from the merchants of London and Bristol,

* See the confession of Bentham about the effect of Burke's pamphlets, in this jurist's *Life and Works*.

relating to the same business, might be entered into on the same occasion. To this, however, the Government would not consent. The petitions were, much against Burke's wishes, referred to another committee of the following day, which he promptly christened a Coventry Committee, and a Committee of Oblivion ; and the justice of the appellations being universally acknowledged, they were loudly applauded and immediately applied by the Opposition. Speaking after Sir William Meredith, who had moved the Ministerial amendment, Burke, by again, said the newspaper reports of the time, turning, twisting, and metamorphosing into the most ridiculous forms every argument the serious baronet had brought forward, kept the House roaring with laughter from the beginning to the end of his speech.* Reserving his keen wit for Sir William, his earnest severity for Lord North, and his affecting pathos for pleading the wrongs of America, which in his splendid rhetoric became a living being, these were, at the time, the varied hues of his chameleon-like oratory.

On the twenty-sixth he delivered a glowing harangue against the whole American policy of the Administration. He concluded with a simile at once so beautiful, striking, and appropriate, that few who heard him could restrain their emotion. Dwelling on the measures employed to ruin the Colonial commerce, which, as a political economist, he showed would rebound as injuriously against the trade of England herself, he illustrated his point by relating the incident of the archer who was about to aim his arrow at the heart of his enemy, when he found that his own child was enfolded in his adversary's arms. "Let your own commerce," said he,

* Parl. Hist., vol. xviii. p. 173.

“ come before you,—see whether it be not your own child that America holds in her arms,—examine whether you ought to shoot at all ; and if you must shoot, shoot so as to avoid wounding what is dearest to you in the world.”*

In most of the debates on the petitions of the merchants which now were poured into the House of Commons from all parts of England, he was equally active. A counter-petition in favour of the coercive system of the Government was presented from Birmingham. But it seemed so extraordinary that commercial people engaged in the trade with North America should desire war, and it was so directly contradicted by a second document signed by the most respectable traders of the same town, it was alleged that the Ministerial petition had been unfairly obtained, and was not, as it purported to be, really from the eminent merchants of Birmingham. As the Ministers were proud of this mark of adhesion, Burke moved that a committee of the House should inquire into the means by which the two rival petitions had been procured ; and Lord North virtually admitted that the petition in favour of the war would not bear investigation, by refusing his sanction to any such inquiry. For the part Burke took in this business he received a highly complimentary address of thanks from the Birmingham merchants who were really engaged in Colonial traffic, and whose sentiments the first petition dishonestly misrepresented.†

Lord North had, however, now made up his mind to proceed boldly in that fatal career of bloodshed to which the Bedford section of the Government, the King, and those who dubbed themselves the King’s friends, had

* Collected Speeches, vol. i. p. 257.

† Ibid., vol. i. p. 258.

long been impelling the irresolute Prime Minister. Two days after the affair of the Birmingham petitions, he moved an Address to the Throne, declaring that from the papers laid before Parliament a rebellion existed in the Province of Massachusetts Bay, and pledging the Commons to stand by their Sovereign with their lives and fortunes. But this Address was not carried without a warm debate, and without a division, in which the minority, though small in comparison to the majority opposed to it, exhibited an unmistakable increase of strength, and was made even more powerful than the numbers counted in the lobby, by the intellectual vigour which Burke and Fox, united in their resistance, communicated to the Opposition. Exposing the disingenuousness of the Ministers, who represented that one province only was guilty, when it was clear that all America was joined in a common cause, Burke showed that in seven different instances a resistance to tyranny was justifiable ; ridiculed the definition of rebellion the Ministers had given, which he said meant the drowning of tea like a puppy dog in the harbour of Boston ; proved that the war would be, whatever the Government might pretend, a war with all the Colonies ; and called on the House to make its choice between British America and an incapable Ministry.

Lord North did not indeed hold the same language for two consecutive days. He shortly after evinced clearly that he was aware of the truth Burke had told him, when he represented that it was a contest with all America ; for, forgetting the falsehoods he had put into the mouth of the Sovereign, and into the Address of the House of Commons, he prepared to bring in a grand penal Bill, an extension of the Port Bill of the last session, to punish

all the New England Colonies for a rebellion which he had officially affirmed to exist in Boston alone. In retaliation for the provincial resolutions neither to export nor import to Great Britain, the Minister suddenly proposed to prohibit the Colonies of New England from trading, not only with Great Britain and Ireland, but also with the West Indies, and even from fishing on the banks of Newfoundland. That this Bill at one swoop reduced to beggary many thousands of the most honest and industrious people on the face of the earth, and that, while taking out of their mouths and the mouths of their children the bread on which their existence depended, it was in no respect efficacious for any purposes of hostility, were considerations of no weight either with the Ministers who proposed or the majority who accepted this shameful measure.

But these considerations deeply affected Burke. They harrowed up his soul. That fierce hatred of all oppression, that intense sympathy with suffering, that genuine philanthropy, which was at the foundation of his moral being, were all fully roused. He spoke most indignantly against the Bill, and, though repeatedly called to order in the course of his vehement invective, was considered to have excelled himself, as he stigmatized the folly and wickedness of making long Acts of general attainder to extinguish trade and proscribe provinces. “The bread of the needy,” said he, “is their life-blood. He who depriveth them of it is a man of blood.”* In the other House, Lord Rockingham, who took a more than ordinarily active and able part in opposition as the crisis approached, was equally determined in resisting the

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 26; and Appendix, vol. iv. p. 476. Parl. Hist., vol. xviii. pp. 389, 396.

Bill ; but an Amendment extending it to other Colonies was added, and all remonstrances were unavailing.

Had all the eminent men in opposition been sincere, earnest, and united in their resistance, the Court and Ministers might possibly have paused in their mad and guilty career, and civil war, even at that last hour, have been averted. As such measures as the Boston Port Bill, the Massachusetts Charter Bill, and the New England Bill were discussed, all who took any interest in public affairs might well ask, where was the Earl of Chatham ? He had violently espoused the cause of the Colonies, he had openly applauded their resistance to Parliamentary taxation, and at times of much less moment he had permitted himself to be carried to the floor of the Senate, with his limbs swathed in flannel. Yet in these great debates on the Ministerial measures he never opened his lips nor showed his face. The whole weight of a detailed Opposition to these absurd and sanguinary schemes was thrown on the Rockingham party ; and even when Chatham did appear, at rare intervals, in public, and declare his opinions, these periods were even made by him more critical to the Whigs than to the Government ; for on each occasion, he generally took care, instead of sinking petty differences on past affairs, to openly avow his dissent from the opinions and policy of Lord Rockingham and Burke. So far from welcoming him at the few times when he deigned oracularly to deliver his sentiments in the House of Lords, they generally looked to these moments with alarm, and felt that the great Earl's strong denunciations of the Government were to the Opposition no accession of strength. On the first day of the session he had appeared in his place, and, without consulting Lord Rock-

ingham and his friends, and even studiously concealing his intention from them, made an unexpected motion for recalling the troops from Boston ; and in his powerful but vague speech in support of it, he, as mischievously as unjustly, charged on the Declaratory Act of the Rockingham Administration all the subsequent troubles. This was what Burke called one of Lord Chatham's tricks.

Lord Rockingham's conduct was the reverse. Though he had grave objections to the Motion recalling the troops, since it abandoned the Colonists who had favoured the Government to the mercies of their enraged and bitterly hostile countrymen ; and though he had a just cause for resenting the manner in which Chatham had at such a moment blamed the Declaratory Act, yet rather than show a dissension in the ranks of the Opposition he supported the Earl's proposal, and even spoke tersely but effectively in its favour. Some days afterwards, again without consulting Lord Rockingham, Chatham proposed a Bill for reconciling America to England, in which the Declaratory Act was among other measures to be repealed, as one of the causes of quarrel ; and again, both in his speech and in the wording of the Bill, the principles and policy of the Rockingham party were directly censured.*

Chatham set an example which found followers. Even Lord North, in the midst of his legislation against the trade of the Colonies, thought of trying his hand in framing a conciliatory Bill. On the nineteenth of February, Burke received a private letter from the Minister, informing him that on the following day he had a measure of importance to propose on the subject of America. Rumours of this attempt at conciliation having been

* Chatham's Correspondence, vol. iv. p. 394 ; and Appendix, No. 1.

generally spread, Burke went down to the House that afternoon, determined to put aside altogether his own prepossessions, and to support any pacific measure, however imperfect, that had the slightest prospect of success.

But he found Lord North's resolution illusory and insidious. The Minister moved, that if any of the Colonies, through their General Assemblies, might propose to contribute to the common defence, and to the expenses of their Government, in such proportions as the King and Parliament could approve, the right of taxation should in these particular provinces be suspended. This settled nothing. There were no grounds for believing that a single Colony would accept a proposal which, in truth, confirmed the right that was in dispute. It seemed indeed intended, like all the legislation of the Government on the American question, to divide the Colonies; and it appeared to Burke utterly futile for that and for every other object. Yet the Bedford portion of the Ministry, and all the King's friends, revolted at the mere pretence of conciliation. The greatest dissension broke out in the Ministerial ranks, and all Sir Gilbert Elliott's powers of persuasion were required to bring the mutinous troops back to their proper standard.*

The Motion was carried; but, as Burke had foretold, the offer was promptly rejected by the Colonies. The Ministers also made good other prophecies from the same lips, by bringing in another Bill like that of New England, for prohibiting the trade of the southern provinces, and by proposing increased estimates for the land and naval forces, instead of the diminished numbers which, to please the country gentlemen who supported

* Chatham's Correspondence, vol. iv. p. 403.

them, they had brought forward before the Christmas holidays.

Burke and his party had opposed almost every American measure in the course of the two sessions. They were openly accused of criticizing unfavourably every proposition, and of having no plan of their own to produce. Nothing, it was said, was so easy as to find fault; but could the opponents of the Ministry do better? Mr. Rose Fuller had taken Burke aside at the beginning of the session, and, professedly as a friend, had spoken to him of the necessity at such a time of hazarding some remedial scheme from the side of the Opposition. The two conciliatory measures of Lord Chatham and Lord North rendered it only more indispensable that the Rockingham party should also show what they were prepared to do for this purpose. The amiable and respectable Lord John Cavendish, though called their leader in the House of Commons, was not thought sufficient for this great rivalry. To Burke, by common consent, was entrusted the honour of the party. Early in March there were several meetings of their political friends held at Lord Rockingham's house in Grosvenor Square, where Burke opened his plan, and the different resolutions, amounting to thirteen in number, were fully discussed. Glover, the author of *Leonidas*, appeared at the bar of the House of Commons as the advocate for peace on the part of the West Indian planters, whose interests were deeply jeopardized, and their trade, which had prodigiously increased, shown by him to depend most materially on their intercourse with the Colonies. Burke, some days afterwards, on the twenty-second of March, stood forward as the orator of peace. Strangers were shut out from the gallery, but the House was filled with

Members. The New England Bill had been returned with an important amendment that afternoon from the Lords; and of this incident, as well as the recent appearance of Glover in green old-age, Burke, in the commencement of his speech, skilfully took advantage.

This exordium was most impressive. His object was peace, sought in the spirit of peace. Peace implied some degree of concession, and this might properly and gracefully come from the superior power. Whatever might be the merits of Lord North's recent resolution, by it he had at least admitted the principle of conciliation. To understand what the concession ought to be, it was necessary to examine into the nature and circumstances of the Colonies. Burke showed that the exports to America all but equalled the whole commerce of England at the commencement of the century, and then electrified the House by that splendid burst of eloquence about the angel and Lord Bathurst, who, then at an advanced age, but apparently as vigorous as ever in mind, resided at Apsley House, and saw his son Lord Chancellor of England. Resuming his subject in detail, he pictured the settlers as agriculturists and as fishers, everywhere covering the wilderness and the most remote seas with the trophies of their hardy industry. From being descendants of Englishmen, professors of a republican religion, habitual readers of books on law, holders of slaves in the southern provinces, and three thousand miles distant from the seat of Imperial government, a strong and refractory spirit of liberty had grown up. To attempt to remove the causes of this spirit by restricting the commercial enterprises of the Colonists, and by withholding any further grants of land, would be an absurd and dangerous experiment. To prosecute it

as criminal, would be drawing up an indictment against a whole people. To give up the Colonies, as had also been recommended, simply because they would not agree to a particular mode of taxation, would be acting like peevish and froward children. To comply with the spirit as necessary was the only statesmanlike and systematic proceeding. Putting aside altogether the mere abstract question of the right of taxation, and being guided solely by experience, there were four precedents in the statute-book to show how Parliament had acted under similar circumstances. Ireland, Wales, Chester, and Durham had each had their complaints listened to, their grievances redressed, and been admitted into the privileges of the Constitution. America might be dealt with in the same spirit of political equity. A direct representation in the British Parliament was, indeed, from the nature of things, not advisable, nor perhaps practicable; but their Colonial Courts or General Assemblies, which were in miniature the very image of the House of Commons, would, as a means of taxation, answer the same purpose. Then were opened in detail the thirteen resolutions. The first six, with three corollaries, were so skilfully drawn that they scarcely affirmed anything of themselves, and were couched almost in the very phraseology which Parliament had itself sanctioned in the instances he had before quoted. Meddling with no theory, and being based on undeniable facts, they formed together a chain of reasoning so irresistible that the House could scarcely reject them without convicting itself of the grossest absurdity. It followed that, if the pacific proposals which they contained were adopted, all legislation, beginning with the Revenue Act of Charles Townshend, and comprehending the

penal Bills of the last session, ought at once to be repealed. To effect this object the concluding resolutions were adapted. The whole formed one massive temple of concord, complete in every part, and efficacious, as the architect pledged himself, for every pacific purpose. After making some passing remarks on Lord North's recent resolution, on the productive nature of voluntary grants, and on the general inexpediency of attempting to raise a revenue from remote countries, the orator concluded with that fine peroration, the noblest in the language, respecting the liberal spirit of the British Constitution. He had spoken for three hours. He had been addressing an audience of which the great majority was strongly opposed to his plan. But genius and truth asserted their supremacy ; Members were kindled with his enthusiasm ; and he sat down amid loud and general applause from all parts of the House and every section of politicians.

Momentary applause was, however, all the positive good attained by this wonderful effort of oratory and wisdom. The stolid Thurlow, the Attorney-General, had been taking notes throughout the speech, and he replied in tones and language fitted for deadening all enthusiasm and reducing the question to the narrow limits of a contest for places between Ministers and the Opposition. Jenkinson, too, the type at once of the King's friend and the people's enemy, followed, in the course of the warm debate, turning the Declaration of Rights at the Revolution, against the spirit and principles in which that Revolution was made ; for he argued, that, as the King could not levy money without the consent of Parliament, so no power but Parliament could make grants to the Crown. He moved the previous question

on the first of Burke's resolutions. Though Fox spoke admirably in support of these conciliatory propositions, two hundred and seventy Members voted themselves satisfied with Jenkinson's pedantic sophistry, while seventy-eight alone supported Burke in this immortal attempt to avert, at the last moment, a sanguinary and unjustifiable war with a people speaking the same language, possessing the same aspirations, and immediately descended from the same ancestors.*

The speech was, however, almost immediately published. It increased the impression that the former oration, which had been but three months accessible to the public, had produced. Being spoken of as Mr. Burke's Conciliation Speech, it was in every one's hands, and found delighted readers in all parts of the Empire. Courtiers and men of letters in the interest of the Court spoke of it as a piece of studied rhetoric, full of florid metaphors, but of little real excellence: the people judged more correctly; and if eloquence and reason had always the effect generally attributed to them in political affairs, England might even then have preserved her American Colonies. Chatham's Bill for the same object was also published with notes, and thus the two great plans for reconciliation, by the two most eloquent orators that English politics had ever produced, could be studied together and compared.

Never were two schemes intended to effect the same purpose, more directly contrasted. The opposite characters of the two statesmen were seen in every line of their political offspring. Chatham proceeded at once by Bill: Burke, by resolutions. Chatham immediately swept away every recognition of Parliamentary authority

* *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xviii. p. 540.

for Imperial taxation, and set himself to acknowledge the abstract principle, that in every part of the world, as well as in the United Kingdom, the consent of every British subject was necessary before he could constitutionally be taxed. Burke, leaving the question of right as a theoretical one, on which men might differ, but of no consequence in restoring peace and concord, simply recorded that the Colonists, not having had the privilege of electing Members of Parliament, had yet been frequently touched and grieved by subsidies granted by Parliament; that no means of representation had yet been devised; that the Colonies still possessed General Courts legally fit for defraying all expenses for the public service; and that as their readiness to do so had been repeatedly acknowledged by Ministers and Parliament, such a mode of levying and granting supplies was more agreeable to the Americans than that of imposing them by Parliament. Chatham began by proposing to repeal the Declaratory Act, which had nothing to do with the real grievances of which the Americans complained. Burke began with the Act of Charles Townshend, which had really revived the claim of taxation, and had indeed produced the open resistance to Parliamentary authority. Admitting the right of taxation to exist in theory, though Burke and Lord Rockingham would not affirm that the power of Parliament for the purpose of taxation, or for any other, could, from its very nature, be limited, they and their friends had however, when in power, scrupulously refrained from taxing America. Chatham, Shelburne, and Camden, while denying that this right of taxation existed at all, and declaring that its exercise was utterly inconsistent with every principle of the British Constitution, had actually been the most eminent Members of the

Government in 1767 that had again taxed America, and that had laid the very tax on tea which had brought the country to the verge of civil war. This was the real difference between Burke and Chatham, and between the Rockingham party and the Shelburne party. It was the consciousness that they had acted wrongly, and that in injuring Lord Rockingham they had injured the best interests of the Empire, which inspired the speeches of Chatham and his followers with so much bitterness and exasperation. The blame which was justly due to themselves for their sanction of Charles Townshend's Revenue Act of 1767, they were ever desirous of turning upon Lord Rockingham's Declaratory Act of 1766. This accounts for Chatham's violent attacks on the Rockingham policy, even in his apparently conciliatory motions at the beginning of the session, and which were very different to the spirit of the splendid conciliatory speech of Burke, that Chatham himself confessed to be "very seasonable, very reasonable, and very eloquent."

After the rejection of this motion by such a great majority, even the most sanguine gave up all hopes of peace. Dr. Franklin, who had long been on very friendly terms with Burke, called on him to bid him farewell the day before he left England, this April. The precise and philosophic Pennsylvanian, who had contrived to rid himself of so many humanizing prejudices, still appeared to have a lingering prejudice in his heart in favour of the mother-country, from which he was afterwards to be the most zealous instrument in separating the American Colonies for ever. He was to apply personally for aid to the Court of Versailles. He was to sign the treaty of alliance between the United States and France. But in the solemn moments of his

last interview with Burke, he appeared to speak with great confidence, and declared, almost with tears in his eyes, that America would never be so happy as she had been under the protection of England.* To Chatham, Franklin nearly at the same time expressed similar sentiments. If this language was really inconsistent with the advice the American was writing to his fellow-colonists, it would still perhaps be uncharitable and unwise to affirm that it was insincere. Men do not appear the same in different circumstances, or when addressing dissimilar individuals. The most earnest of American patriots, familiar with England, and accustomed during a long life to associate himself with English power and glory, might naturally feel some compunction in taking leave of such men as Chatham or Burke, at the commencement of a war which would henceforth make them foreigners to each other.

Some circumstances were also yet wanting to render the great British Colonies fully united. The General Assembly of New York, for which Burke was the agent, had not formally joined the continental Congress. Instead of expressing officially their approval of all that the delegates had done in the autumn at Philadelphia, and sinking their provincial independence in the action of the common body, they had preferred sending separately a petition to the King, a Memorial to the House of Commons, a Representation to the Lords, and a Remonstrance, in which the grievances of America were recapitulated, and redress from the Imperial Legislature constitutionally requested. New York was of all the Colonies the most moderate and most attached to the British Crown. The application to Parliament at such a mo-

* Burke, in the *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*.

ment was a conservative and loyal proceeding. Such a spirit it might naturally be expected that the English Ministers would make almost any sacrifice to cultivate. It even coincided with their own favourite policy of spreading disunion among the Colonies.

On the fifteenth of May, Burke moved that this complaint in the form of a Remonstrance, should be received. He was so ill that he was unable to speak for any length of time ; but he earnestly conjured the House not to let this fair opportunity of putting an end to these unhappy differences, escape. His colleague Cruger seconded the motion in a spirited and sensible speech. Yet on the same miserable plea which had been brought forward to excuse the rejection of Burke's conciliatory resolutions, Cornwall and Jenkinson spoke against receiving the paper ; and the whole power of the Government was exerted to prevent it being laid upon the table. By a majority of three to one it was insolently repudiated, as contrary to the Declaration of Rights, and subversive of the supremacy of Parliament.*

It was indeed, as Burke had said, the last opportunity for Parliament voluntarily to show a pacific spirit. The House had just contemptuously rejected this Representation and Remonstrance when they learnt that the civil war had begun.

* Parl. Hist., vol. xviii. pp. 643-650.

CHAPTER XXII.

1775-1776.

FROM WAR TO INDEPENDENCE.

THE winter months had been spent by both sides in preparations for hostilities. The Colonists hemmed in General Gage round Boston, they erected powder-mills, they collected military stores ; and the authorities of the Crown were compelled to look on as helpless spectators of what, with all their boasting and confidence, they were quite unable to prevent. In Rhode Island, cannon were taken from the fortifications. In New Hampshire, a fort was destroyed and a large supply of powder seized. In open disobedience to a circular letter of the Secretary of State, deputies for another General Congress were everywhere chosen. The Provincial Assembly of Massachusetts called on the people to save the Colony from ignominious slavery, and strongly exhorted the militia to perfect themselves in their exercises and discipline. Concord was made a place-of-arms, and there an immense magazine was established, with cannon, powder, balls, and flour necessary to supply a large force engaged in active warfare. Gage, after having made an unsuccessful attempt to take some cannon at Salem, determined at length to destroy the stores which were daily augmenting at Concord. A body of troops quietly crossed the river in boats, during the night of the eighteenth of April, and advanced into the

country. Every precaution had been taken to keep the expedition a secret, but as the soldiers proceeded on their march, the firing of guns and the ringing of bells announced to them that the alarm had been given. At daybreak they reached Lexington. They were there met by a portion of the militia, who before they withdrew exchanged shots with the royal troops; and the first blood of the civil war was shed. The soldiers continued their march to Concord, where they succeeded in spiking some cannon, and in throwing much powder, flour, and ball into the river. But the country was fast rising around them; from every house and wall the sharp crack of the rifle was heard; their quick march back to Lexington became a double quick, and at last a scandalous flight. Fortunately they were met by a strong reinforcement with two pieces of artillery. Into the open squares of their comrades the exhausted soldiers flung themselves, panting like deer after a chase. After some delay the march was resumed, and at night the combined detachments again reached Concord; but being harassed all the way by the triumphant militia, and the whole force in imminent danger of being cut off, the awe with which the Colonists had regarded the redcoats was, in the first scene of actual conflict, completely dispelled.

All the Colony sprang to arms. More than twenty thousand men encircled the royal troops round Boston, which, with the fortifications on the isthmus and men-of-war crowding the harbour, and holding all approaches within range of their guns, had become, by a singular change of fortune, the inexpugnable citadel of British authority. The month of May passed away without any change in the relative positions of the hostile forces. Burgoyne, Howe, and Clinton, generals who had been

selected for their supposed energy and ability, arrived, with more troops. With the exception however of a foolish proclamation declaring martial law and offering a free pardon to all who would lay down their arms, but Samuel Adams and John Hancock, the month of June was half spent, and General Gage had literally done nothing to extricate himself from his embarrassment, or to justify the extravagant vaunting with which he had assumed the Governorship of Massachusetts.

But early on the seventeenth, both troops and Colonists were awoke by a furious cannonading from the harbour. A ship of war had opened fire on some works which seemed to have risen up by magic in the night on an eminence within the isthmus connecting Charlestown with the continent. This position had hitherto been neglected by both sides; but no sooner had the English generals beheld the works in progress, than they saw its importance, and they resolved to take it at any cost. Throughout the whole morning the roar of artillery directed from every point against the works was incessant and tremendous. Amid all the storm of heavy ordnance, the Colonists coolly persevered in throwing up their entrenchments. At noon troops were landed. Under cover of the fire from the ships, they slowly proceeded up the hill. Over Boston a black canopy hung, from the discharge of so much artillery, but elsewhere all was clear: the sun of June was high above the heads of the combatants, and the sky was without a cloud. Twice the British troops advanced to the attack; twice they were driven back with great loss. They at last carried the works at the point of the bayonet; but not until after many officers and men had fallen, and the Americans had signally displayed in defence of their posts the cool-

ness and intrepidity of veteran soldiers. This was called the battle of Bunker's Hill, and, though abstractedly a mere affair of entrenchments, in its results one of the great and immortal battles of the world.

The nominal victory was with the British forces; all its substantial advantages with the Colonists. Washington was appointed Commander-in-Chief by the General Congress, and, with Charles Lee as one of the Major-Generals, soon afterwards arrived at the American camp. The Royal troops were more closely than ever blockaded in their lines. Congress replied to the proclamation of General Gage by a masterly manifesto, which, though still ostensibly pacific, was in truth an official declaration of war. They also once more sent a petition to the King, and addresses both to the people of England and Ireland. Georgia, the only province which had yet held out, gave in her adhesion to the common cause; and the once loyal British settlements became the Thirteen United Colonies, appealing to the God of Battles against Royal obstinacy and Ministerial majorities.

As soon as Burke read Gage's proclamation of the twelfth of June, he saw that a conflict between the two armies was inevitable. The next mail confirmed his anticipations. He kindled with the excitement of pacific Pennsylvania, and could not sleep at night from thinking of the marching and countermarching of the colonial militia, the embarkation of troops, the resolutions of the American Congress, and the fortifications of Boston. The civil war he had so long deprecated had come at last. He looked sadly back to his efforts at conciliation, and thought of his thirteen resolutions of the 22nd of March, which might even then have averted hostilities.*

* Correspondence, vol. ii. pp. 33-39.

Yet at this time he found himself assailed in an unexpected quarter, on account of this great speech for peace, by a divine who also professed to dislike the war.

Dr. Josiah Tucker had long distinguished himself as a prolific pamphleteer. The son of a Welsh farmer in moderate circumstances, he had fought his way to political knowledge and ecclesiastical preferment. He obtained a curacy at Bristol, and, by regular gradation, a prebend's stall in the cathedral, and the rectorship of St. Stephen's. His parishioners being principally engaged in commercial pursuits, Tucker's love of political economy was increased by the people with whom he was in daily intercourse. On many questions his views were most enlightened, and far beyond those which the citizens of Bristol in general were disposed to tolerate. He became so obnoxious to his fellow-townsman for his publications in favour of the Jews, and the naturalization of foreigners, that they burnt him in effigy, dressed in his clergyman's gown, and with one of his pamphlets in his hand. Taking an active part in electioneering contests, he was, in 1758, chiefly instrumental in effecting the return of Lord Clare as Member for Bristol; and for his services on that occasion, he was made Dean of Gloucester. He continued to publish pamphlets on every political question, as it arose. His style was generally dogmatic, frequently intemperate, sometimes scurrilous; never calm, philosophical, nor elevated. He more politically excited attention by his violent antipathy to the Colonies, and his treatment of commercial topics. He stood alone in that day in advocating the apparently contradictory propositions of the right of Parliamentary taxation, and also of the inutility of Colonies to the mother-country. He was regarded respectively as a

madman, political quack, and self-seeking clergyman. Warburton, the Bishop of his diocese, pointedly said of him, "The Dean's trade is religion, and religion his trade." In his speech of the nineteenth of April, 1774, Burke, in alluding to the divine as the advocate of the King's friends, had expressed himself much to the same effect: "This Dr. Tucker," said the orator, "is now a Dean, and his earnest labours in the same vineyard will, I suppose, raise him to a bishopric." The sarcastic sentence would, perhaps, never have appeared in the published report of that oration, had it not been for Tucker's strong political partisanship against Burke, and in favour of the Ministerial candidates at the recent Bristol election. Not choosing however to meet this imputation directly, it was not until Burke had published the conciliatory speech, that the Dean came into the field against him, with a Letter to Edmund Burke, Esq., Member for the City of Bristol, and Agent for the Colony of New York.

This reply was not happy, neither was the occasion well chosen. If the war was so undesirable, as Tucker argued, it was scarcely wise in him at such a moment to assail the most eminent politician for his great oration in the cause of peace, and to endeavour to stimulate, by violent invectives against the Colonies, the growing animosity of the British people. He called Burke the American pensioner, an artful more than a solid reasoner, one who more than any other man living excelled in using ambiguous expressions, who tried with Jesuitical disingenuity to amuse his audience with great swelling words, and who even did not stop short of asserting the most barefaced falsehoods. All this, too, was applied to a speech which was peculiarly distinguished among

Burke's productions for the calmness and moderation of its tone, which even those who opposed it had admitted to be most reasonable and luminous, and which now carries conviction to the mind of every reader. At the same time, to brand the Colonists as rebels, to depreciate the value of their trade, and to accuse them of infamously cheating their English creditors, could equally serve no good purpose. Yet this is what Dr. Tucker did, and this is the man whom some writers have supposed, in his ideas on Colonial matters, to have been superior to Burke. The difference between them, as Tucker himself stated in another pamphlet of about the same time, was, that while the statesman, believing that Colonies were really valuable possessions, would comply with the distinction between internal and external taxation which the Americans had themselves drawn, and thus avoid a sanguinary and unnatural war; the divine, considering Colonies to be of no use whatever, and even positively injurious to England, would, rather than not tax them in a manner they objected to, separate from them in a passion.* Even as an abstract political economist, it would be difficult to show that Tucker was really profound in his notions on the American question. If all the Colonial advantages could be preserved, even after a separation, they could surely have been preserved without the exercise of that right of taxation which Tucker and his political friends resolutely upheld, not only in theory, but also in practice. It was impossible logically to combine in the particular circumstances of that age the courtly propensities of Dr. Markham and

* Tucker argued even, in his Letter to Burke, that Colonies had caused the ruin of Spain, and wrote of "the baleful influence of colony connection."

the commercial principles of Adam Smith ; or to declaim against Burke and his conciliatory propositions, and in the same voice to blame the war.

Burke was amused with the Dean's pamphlet. He joked upon it with the most intimate of his Bristol friends, Richard Champion, a Quaker merchant, with whom he regularly corresponded ; but the time for mere theories, either of taxation, conciliation, or peevish separation, was past.

The blast of the trumpet was calling the nation to arms. All the disposable forces in the British Islands were hurrying on board transports. Even Gibraltar and Minorca were deprived of their English regiments, and five battalions of Hanoverian troops sent into the garrisons. A large armament was getting ready in the royal dockyards. The merchants, turning from the commercial routine of peace, were eager to indemnify themselves for their losses from the stoppage of the American trade, by supplying the commissariat and engaging in the lucrative business of finding transports for the Government. The people, untaught and misled, were infected by the infatuation of their superiors, and, calling the Colonists rebels, were becoming eager for bloodshed.

Burke, in some earnest letters, laid these circumstances before Lord Rockingham. He requested the Marquis to consult their friends and decide before Parliament met what course the party should take. They might, as long as they were unsupported by public opinion in their opposition, absent themselves from Parliament ; or Lord Rockingham might at once come to town, as he had done in resisting the Irish Absentee Tax, and begin a vigorous personal interposition ; but something it was

fully necessary to do, in order to prevent the Opposition from becoming a mere convenience of the Ministry, and the country from sinking into one mass of national wretchedness. As, through all the Ministerial projects, Burke had seen a war as the inevitable result, so now when it was begun, neither from success nor from misfortune did he expect anything but calamity to England, and the certainty of other Powers engaging in this most impolitic contest.*

While full of such thoughts, he received a circular letter from the American Congress, desiring him, among other Colonial Agents, to attend the presentation of their last petition to the King. He fully approved of the principle of this application; it harmonized with all his ideas; he was anxious that it should be received and have the fair consideration of the Sovereign and his advisers. Knowing himself however to be only the agent of the General Assembly of New York, which had not yet sent deputies to the Congress, he respectfully but firmly declined to take any active part in the delivery of this document to the Secretary of State. He however regretted as much as any one, that under the usual pretence of its being the offspring of an illegal assembly, no answer was given to it, and that this olive-branch, as it was called, from being disdainfully disregarded, was changed into another weapon of strife. In England it excited little attention. By America, the rejection of this her last appeal to the parental bosom was never forgotten, nor forgiven.

Burke had just at that time to attend to his own constituency. He found the honour of representing Bristol to involve many onerous and tiresome attentions. It

* Correspondence, vol. ii. pp. 46-55.

was indeed no sinecure. The courtship was to continue even after the lady had been won. Bristol expected a visit from her Member every year. Such an annual journey to a man like Burke, who was always fatigued by his Parliamentary duties during the session and had very little superfluous money to spend in affording hogsheads of port-wine for the palates of the sharp tradesmen of Bristol, was both a great trouble and a great expense. Cruger had however been acting very foolishly, the Tories were on the alert, and Burke had to go down, in order that the Whig interest might not be compromised.

The visit had a good effect. There were four parties in the town, consisting in about equal proportions of zealous Whigs and zealous Tories, and of lukewarm Whigs and lukewarm Tories. Tucker was diligently improving the prospects of his friend Lord Clare, and, though the Tory candidates were at present defeated, the Dean looked forward to a renewed contest at the next general election. Burke did his best, by standing godfather, either personally or by proxy, to the children of Quakers and Dissenters of every denomination, by attending to the private Bills of the town, by encouraging his friends to meet regularly at the Bell tavern, by forming a secret committee for electioneering business, and by dining almost every day publicly with the Corporation, to atone for the absence of those substantial favours which a Member of the Opposition, without rank or wealth, had no power to confer. But in the mere chase for popularity by little attentions to private interests and small human vanities, it was not difficult to foresee that an idle candidate of the Court would distance the greatest and most industrious of political philosophers. For the present however all was well. The Tories were pre-

vented carrying in the Corporation an Address to the Throne in favour of the war, and Burke concerted with his friends the means of obtaining from the town a petition against the policy. It was to be ready as soon as Parliament met.

On his return he wrote again to Lord Rockingham, reporting the condition of what he called his own little department, and again resuming his exhortations for a definite plan of political operations in the face of such mighty troubles.

The words that have been ascribed to the great orator of Greece as the principal qualification for his art, express the whole tenour of Burke's ever-renewed advice to his political friends. Action! Action! and, again, Action! was his constant cry; but it was most frequently disregarded. Lord Rockingham, on consulting Lord John Cavendish, Sir George Savile, and the Duke of Manchester, thought that nothing could be done until the session began, and he remained at Wentworth until October.

Burke also applied both to the Dukes of Portland and Richmond. His counsels were similar to what he had given to Lord Rockingham; but he wished them also to exert themselves to encourage their powerful friends in Ireland to put their country forward as the mediator between Great Britain and America. His native country rose in provincial dignity with the war; and he hoped much good to both countries from such an interference. The Duke of Portland, in return, asked him to write something more on the American question, in public vindication of their policy; and his Grace of Richmond asked him to sit to Romney for his picture. It appears that Burke did meditate some other political composition,

which he speedily relinquished, or which perhaps was afterwards incorporated with his next published writing.* The portrait he had promised the Duke of Richmond in the past session, and only requested him to wait until he had moved his conciliatory resolutions. His noble correspondent now told him that if he had to wait until Burke was perfectly at leisure, he might wait all his life ; and that the portrait must represent him either reading or writing, for to paint him staring any one in the face and doing nothing, would give no idea at all of his energetic animation and busy habits.

The Duke's observations were just. Burke was always doing something ; and his friends, by degrees, grew accustomed to expect him to do everything. To sketch all their resolutions, to draw up all their petitions for their different counties and towns, to correct their answers to complimentary addresses, to digest all their protests, to rouse them to exertion when they were inclined to sit down in listless despair, to defend them in Parliament, and to justify their politics through the press, all this was not thought sufficient. When they died, he was expected to write their epitaphs.

A service of this nature he was at this time requested to perform. Poor Dowdeswell had been dead some months ; and his widow, who was erecting a monument to him in Bushley Church, wished Burke to write the inscription. Thus originated the first of those beautiful tributes to the memory of his deceased friends, which are not the least valuable and impressive of his compositions. It is distinguished by greater length than others of the series, or than is generally considered appropriate in such productions ; but he endeavoured to

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 83.

make each touch characteristic of his late friend, and not mere general eulogy. In this respect he was fully satisfied with the epitaph: every line, he said, might be deposited on oath.* The sad contest that was then being carried on with the Colonies only made Burke look more regretfully back to the time when he and Dowdeswell together resisted the fatal policy of the Administration. Few sentences are more affecting than those in which he there records how this honest country gentleman devoted himself to the finances of his country, which he preferred to everything but its liberties; and that his last efforts were spent in attempting to avert a civil war, which, being unable to prevent, he had not the misfortune to see.

Burke himself had this misfortune, and was again called to his Parliamentary duties. As usual, his prophecies of the session had been fulfilled in the recess. Every plan of the Administration had miscarried. Every promise they had made to their supporters had been disappointed. The army, which was to look down all opposition, could not itself look the American militia in the face. New York, the most loyal of the British provinces, was at last lost to the Government; the southern Colonies were as eager for resistance as the northern; Canada had been invaded, and was all but in the hands of the New Englanders; without striking a blow, the Ministry, by their incompetence, appeared to have lost a whole continent.

Yet the people were far from being impressed with the extent of their calamities. They seemed to be quite ignorant of the serious nature of the struggle in which they were engaged. So much had been so long said

* Dowdeswell's *Memoir*: Appendix to *Cavendish Reports*, vol. i.

about an American war, that now, when it had really broken out, many persons scarcely realized it as a fact; and they received the news of the retreat from Lexington and the battle of Bunker's Hill with absolute indifference. The early summons of Parliament for the twenty-sixth of October began to awaken them from their apathy; by degrees they shook off their morbid listlessness; and addresses to the Throne poured in from all parts of the kingdom. In many of these papers the members of the Opposition were blamed for their sympathies with the rebels. In the newspapers it was even reported that the Government had intercepted some highly treasonable correspondence between their leading opponents in both Houses and the insurgent Colonists; and that Burke and many others would probably be committed to the Tower. As though to give some plausibility to these stories, the nation learnt with surprise and horror, that a Mr. Sayer, a banker, had actually been arrested, by order of the Secretary of State, on the absurd charge of meditating the seizure of the King's person as he opened Parliament, shutting him up in the Tower, and afterwards conveying him out of the kingdom. This was evidently a political manœuvre of the Ministers to draw off attention from their incapacity.

They were, however, mistaken. The King's Speech was of extraordinary length; an amendment was moved in the House of Commons; the debate was unusually fierce and long; the Opposition counted above a hundred; and it was not until half-past four in the morning that the Address was voted. Conway in one House, and the Duke of Grafton in the other, though they had long steadily supported Lord North against the Rockingham party, and had held important official situations, showed

their alarm at the situation of affairs, and inveighed strongly against the Administration. Fox began to display powers for debate which had never before been exhibited, and in the most vigorous language assailed Lord North. Burke, with great wit, called the Minister's attention to the boasts he had made of bringing the Americans to his feet; kept the House roaring with laughter at the ridiculous contrast which was then seen; and advised the Ministry to meet America in a friendly spirit, and not to let England appear any longer like an angry porcupine, armed all over with penal Acts of Parliament.* The spirit with which the Opposition commenced their struggle on the first day of the session was vigorously maintained. The Minister found that the contest in which he had embarked was considered by the more honest portion of his own supporters as a very serious business; and the Tory country gentlemen, who had for years been gradually ranking themselves among the habitual supporters of the Court, were extremely indignant at the manner in which foreign troops had, without the consent of Parliament, been sent to garrison Port Mahon and Gibraltar. This was justly regarded as a most unconstitutional proceeding; and to prevent a summary defeat on the question, Lord North was, much against his will, compelled to bring in a Bill of Indemnity.

Every measure of the Government was severely criticized. In all these debates Burke appeared as the most prominent Member. He sternly condemned a petition which had been presented to the King from the University of Oxford, applauding the American measures, and reflecting on the Opposition. It was not fitting, he said, that grave and reverend men to whom the educa-

* *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xviii. p. 769.

tion of the young was entrusted, should show themselves so zealous for a civil war. He told the House that he had himself a son at Oxford, and that he could not approve of that son being informed by the heads of the University that his father was an abettor of rebels.*

He also attacked Jenkinson, as the real author of measures that Lord North reluctantly proposed. Indeed, while the Prime Minister dwelt on the terms of peace that Commissioners about to be appointed might take out with them, Jenkinson interfered in the debate, and speaking, as was supposed, the language of authority, declared himself decidedly for war, sneered at the cowardice of declining the contest, and treated contemptuously all overtures for a pacification. The Minister, anxious to make up for lost time, introduced details which were seldom considered before Christmas, and pushed the business of the session vigorously forward. A Militia Bill, with extensive powers in the Crown, was steadily carried through, notwithstanding a strong opposition. The Army and Navy Estimates were brought in, the House went into several committees of supply, and the land-tax was again raised to four shillings in the pound. This measure being of course peculiarly obnoxious to the country gentlemen whose pockets it directly affected, Burke ironically congratulated them on the results of their favourite policy of seeking a revenue in America, to relieve themselves from the pecuniary burdens of the Seven Years' War.

He met, however, at this moment, with a domestic calamity. On the twelfth of November his father-in-law died. The kind and amiable physician's health had long been failing, and his presence was now for ever

* Parl. Hist., vol. xviii. p. 854.

withdrawn from that happy family circle which his pleasant manners, refined conversation, and gentle smiles had so long cheered. At least his early appreciation of his son-in-law, and his beneficence to Burke and his wife in their days of hard struggle, had been fully rewarded. He had lived to see him acknowledged as the most brilliant of orators and as the foremost of enlightened politicians in the House of Commons. He had lived to see him regarded as, on the whole, the most intellectual and accomplished man, with the highest reputation, and, as might be hoped, with the most assured promise of worldly greatness at that time in the British Empire. With his daughter perfectly happy in her domestic life, with a grandson already giving indications of ability and virtue, much respected by all who knew him, and sincerely regretted by his friends, the good doctor might well sink peacefully to rest.

He left a vacancy in many hearts. Not the least impressive testimony to his worth was given by Dr. Johnson. Nugent was one of the few men the old man of letters sincerely respected, and whose esteem he highly prized. The retired physician's favourite dish at the Club used to be an omelet, and one day, after his death, a similar preparation was placed before Johnson at Mrs. Thrale's. "Ah, my dear Nugent," he exclaimed in real agony, "I shall never eat omelet with thee again!" *

Four days after his father-in-law's death, Burke was called upon to fulfil a duty of which he had given notice. He resolved to make one last effort to restore peace; and on the sixteenth of November made a motion for the introduction of a Bill to quiet the minds of his

* Mrs. Piozzi's Anecdotes.

Majesty's American subjects. Like his former resolutions, this measure had not been framed without many consultations with his political friends; had been couched in the most moderate terms that could be employed; and had the earnest approval of Fox, who spared no importunities with his fashionable associates, to induce them to give it their support.* As in all Burke's efforts at remedial legislation, experience was his great guide, so he modelled this Bill, which really, though not in express words, gave up the right of taxation, on the celebrated Statute of Edward I.'s reign, known as the Statutum de tallagio non concedendo. In his speech, which embraced a great variety of matter, and which occupied more than three hours, he gave his reasons for copying this particular law, and powerfully commented upon the great precedent for restoring unity and happiness between the governors and the governed. He solemnly declared, from information which had never yet failed him, that, if this Bill were adopted, it would produce immediate peace. He concluded by earnestly appealing to the consciences of all who heard him, to say whether they had any grounds of confidence in supporting a Government which was only a Government in name; and whether anarchy instead of government, and civil discord rather than national peace, would not be the certain effects of a perseverance in measures conceived without wisdom and conducted without ability.† The debate was highly interesting and animated. All the best speakers distinguished themselves both for and against the motion. Sir George Savile, Lord John

* See Fox's Letter to Lord Ossory, Nov. 5, 1775: *Memorials and Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 140.

† *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xviii. pp. 963-978.

Cavendish, Charles Fox and two of his friends, Fitzpatrick and Ossory, whom he had prevailed upon to declare against the Government, all warmly supported Burke. On the other side were the Ministerial tools Welbore Ellis, Grey Cooper, and the Solicitor-General Wedderburne, who kept the attention of the House alive at three o'clock in the morning by a fine oration in reply to Fox. Lord North, either through fatigue or alarm at the consequences of his policy, spoke with so much doubt and hesitation that it began to be rumoured that he saw the necessity of conceding what Burke had so eloquently demanded, and that he was on the point of resigning his place to Jenkinson. The previous question had however been moved, and at four o'clock Burke's motion was negatived by just two to one, 210 to 105. As this was, however, the greatest relative number that the Opposition had yet counted on an American question, they considered the defeat as a triumph.*

Nor would the Ministerial majority have been so great as it was, had it not been for a little disingenuous artifice. In the Speech from the Throne some hints of an accommodation had been thrown out, and Governor Pownall moved the previous question to Burke's motion, on the ground that Lord North had given notice of a pacific plan, which would in a few days be introduced with all the authority of Government.

What that plan was, soon appeared. On the twentieth it was developed in the House of Commons, and this conciliatory proposition turned out to be nothing less than a project for starving into submission the Thirteen Colonies by restraining them from all trade and intercourse.

* *Annual Register, 1766, p. 109.*

It was called the Prohibitory Bill, and was in no respect a conciliatory measure, except in giving the Crown power to appoint Commissioners to inquire into the grievances of particular colonies or particular individuals; and, on their complete submission, to relieve them from the restraint of this rigorous enactment.

These measures for destroying the commerce of the Colonies appeared to Burke the most odious of all the forms which tyrannical legislation could assume. He regarded this Prohibitory Bill as most wicked and sacrilegious.* In every stage he opposed it most vehemently, and asked Lord North if he were not really insulting the feelings and understandings of mankind, when he stated that this was the scheme for peace which the King's Speech had led them to expect? Our Saviour had sent His Apostles to teach and proclaim peace to all nations; but the political apostles to be sent out by this Bill would be the harbingers of civil war in all its most horrid and hideous forms, accompanied by fire, sword, and famine.† In truth, these Commissioners were detained in England for months, which are ages in civil war; and they only proceeded to America when it was certain that the mission could have no good effect. As Member for Bristol, Burke had, after the Bill had substantially been carried, to see Lord North about the modification of some clauses which fell with peculiar hardship on his constituents and on all who had engaged in the West Indian trade; and he had also, after it had been sent up to the Lords and been energetically but vainly resisted by Lord Rockingham and his noble friends, to write them a protest of indignant eloquence

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 88.

† Parl. Hist., vol. xviii. p. 1034.

and powerful argument. This protest contains no less than ten paragraphs of the most brilliantly condensed political philosophy, and it is perhaps the finest that has ever been recorded on the journals of the House of Lords.*

As the work done before Christmas was much greater than usual, the holidays were longer than usual. Parliament did not meet again for the remainder of the session until late in February. During the interval it was reported that Burke's friends intended putting him in nomination for the Chamberlainship of the City of London. This valuable appointment made the fortunate competitor easy for life in his pecuniary circumstances. Being also a place of great trust, the sureties were proportionately large. The candidate was accustomed to get all his wealthy friends to become security for the required amount, and it was generally considered, though the obligation might be merely nominal, the occasion of a general testimony in his favour. Mrs. Elizabeth Montague, hearing the report of Burke's intended candidature, wrote to him a letter, requesting him as a favour not to forget her among the other friends to whom he must apply for the indispensable qualification. Either, however, the report was altogether false, or the intention was soon abandoned. Mrs. Montague's letter is the only evidence that has been found of this momentary project.†

Mrs. Montague, as yet, still lived in Hill-street, where Burke had been, in his days of authorship, a gratified and frequent visitor. She had fully established herself in the position to which she then aspired, and reigned the undisputed Queen of the Blues. As the champion of

* Parl. Hist., vol. xviii. p. 1088.

† Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 91.

Shakespeare against Voltaire, she was considered a national heroine. All who affected literature and professed to love art, were delighted on finding themselves part of the semicircle round the fire in her drawing-room, or quoting and criticizing under her rich peacock hangings. Mrs. Montague understood the art of attracting even the most intellectual of men around her: as she gave good dinners, she found her accomplished visitors always ready to accept her invitations. Anxious to say a good thing, and talking with considerable eloquence, she appeared, notwithstanding her literary pretensions, far from insensible to the additional fascinations which an ostentatious display of great wealth affords, even in the eyes of philosophers; and, notwithstanding that she was in her fifty-eighth year, lauk in her form, sharp in her features, with eyes unpleasantly bright, a harsh voice, and an unfeminine manner, all the arts of the toilet were elaborately employed to adorn her meagre person, her diamond necklace was prominently worn, and she affected all the graces of eighteen. It is significant, however, that as Burke became eminent as a politician, he became less frequently a visitor at Mrs. Montague's. There, at this period, was Johnson, with his sonorous utterances and rolling form; and there was Reynolds, with his trumpet at his ear, his serene features, and his keenly observant eyes ever on the watch for new subjects and attitudes to portray: but Burke, though his presence was always desired, seldom made his appearance, and then but at rare intervals, in this sparkling assembly of wit, fashion, and literature.

At the evening parties of his countrywoman, and Mrs. Montague's friend and rival, the good-natured and unpretending Mrs. Vesey, in Bolton-row, he was more fre-

quently seen. Mrs. Montague always endeavoured to give the law, and to be the first person at her table, loaded with the most weighty plate, and in her drawing-room, decorated with the most costly magnificence, where every visitor sat studiously ranged according to his rank or celebrity. Mrs. Vesey, determined that all her friends should be at their ease, would allow of no exclusive circle, and permitted every one to walk, saunter, lounge, or sit, according to pleasure. Never presuming to lead the conversation, she only thought of entertaining her guests. With a thoroughly Irish temperament, she was ever committing the most ridiculous blunders. Being afflicted with deafness, she had generally a reserve of speaking trumpets on her wrists, about her neck, or on the nearest mantelpiece, and would fly desperately from one talker to another, eager to hear the conversation; and, on being too late, would exclaim, "Well! I really thought you were talking of something!" or when these disappointments became more frequent, "I can't conceive why it is that nobody talks tonight. I can't catch a word."* "Don't mind your dress! Come in your blue stockings!" she had answered to a gentleman whom she was inviting to one of her evening entertainments, years ago, at Bath; and hence arose the word blue-stocking, though the meaning it afterwards popularly assumed was however more justly derived from the associations of Mrs. Montague's numerous and ambitious meetings. Mrs. Vesey, with other innumerable peculiarities, was also remarkable for a very short memory. As she was speaking one day, with much indignation, against ladies who married a second time, her attention was politely called to the fact of Mr. Vesey

* Madame D'Arblay's Memoirs of Dr. Burney, vol. ii: p. 266.

being her second husband. She rejoined, with astonishment, “ Bless me ! my dear, I had quite forgotten it.”*

Burke was generally considered the most illustrious of Mrs. Vesey’s visitors. He had, however, in these hours of relaxation, a habit which, in persons of less eminence, would scarcely have been considered polite. If, on entering a drawing-room unexpectedly, he found no person with whom he cared to enter into conversation, or wished to avoid some political opponent with whom he happened to be personally at variance, he would seize upon the first book he could find, withdraw into a corner, or throw himself upon a sofa, and begin reading aloud. If, on these occasions, a volume of French poetry happened to fall into his hands, the verses would be read out by him with great enthusiasm and enjoyment, but also with every word delivered in the broadest English accents, as though the two languages had a common pronunciation.†

Many admirers would immediately leave their own seats to gather respectively in his vicinity. His presence either at Mrs. Vesey’s, Mrs. Montague’s, or at the Club, brought with it all the associations of the great politician as well as of the eminent author. Though, since his entrance into Parliament, no longer a constant attendant at the Turk’s Head, when he did appear he always brought with him an irresistible charm. Literature being no longer his business, but his amusement, the society of authors and of men eminent in the polite arts became to him the most delightful of relaxations. The contrast between them and the vulgar officials

* Wraxall’s *Historical Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 149.

† Madame D’Arblay’s *Memoirs of Dr. Burney*, vol. ii. p. 267, and vol. iii. p. 171.

whose misdeeds his busy hours were spent in correcting or reprobating, rendered this literary intercourse soothing and exhilarating. His brow became smooth and his features pleasant, as politics were momentarily thrown aside. The earnest and anxious tone of his letters and speeches on public affairs would have appeared quite incomprehensible to those who only saw him at the Club, or at Reynolds's dinner-table, where he was ready to be Master of the Horse to Johnson as Dictator, in suggesting to Dean Barnard the present of another hogshead of wine, or to draw up at the moment, with perfect felicity, a round robin to the Doctor, intimating the opinion that Goldsmith's epitaph should be written in English rather than in Latin. It would be needless to repeat in detail anecdotes which Boswell, in the most popular biography in the language, has rendered familiar to every reader. Burke, in these hours of social intercourse, was at once so great and amiable, that to those who only saw this feature of his life he seemed to be the happiest and most enviable of men.*

Yet, as the year 1776 was entered upon, Burke was indeed far from being cheerful at heart. Every day England seemed to be more doggedly and blindly accepting this civil war, from which, in his opinion, no good could possibly come; and every letter from America portended or certified civil to the British cause. In the Club and at Mrs. Montague's, literary persons were criticizing the first volume of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman*

* I find in Boswell's Letters a confirmation of these remarks. He writes in the August of 1775: "It is absurd to hope for continual happiness in this life; few men, if any, enjoy it. I have a kind of belief that Edmund Burke does: he has so much knowledge, so much animation, and the consciousness of so much fame."—Boswell's Letters, p. 318.

Empire, and indignantly denouncing the impiety of the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters. Burke also found time to read the book, and, with natural repugnance, to declare to Sir Joshua Reynolds that the style of this new work was execrable. But in truth it was the decline and fall of the British Empire, through the suicidal policy which the learned author of this Roman history was silently and complacently supporting, and thus indicating in his own case the little value of the philosophy which, according to the specious phrase of Bolingbroke, was taught by examples, that appeared to Burke as a not improbable consequence of the miserable undertaking of the Government. From Canada the news arrived in January, that General Carleton had been unable to make head against the invasion of the Colonists, that St. John's had fallen, that Quebec was in imminent danger, and that the whole province was on the point of being lost to Great Britain. From Boston the accounts were not much better; by the first serious enterprise of Washington and his army, the town might be rendered untenable; and it was rumoured that the Royal army would speedily be withdrawn. From Virginia Lord Dunmore had been driven out, after emancipating the negroes of the Colonists, proclaiming martial law, seeing some of his best troops killed or taken prisoners, and burning down to the ground the most prosperous commercial town of the province; and he found himself on board a man-of-war with his liberated slaves and a fleet of loyal Colonists, cut off from all intercourse with the shore, and in an inclement season sailing here and there more like an outlawed pirate than the noble Governor of a British colony. The Governor of South Carolina and the Governor of North Carolina were in circumstances not dis-

similar; for, after exasperating the Colonists, they both had been compelled to take refuge on board ships of war, and beheld the administration of their provinces pass, almost without a struggle, into the hands of those whom they had declared rebels.

Such was apparently the disastrous state of affairs when Parliament reassembled after the Christmas vacation. Fox immediately moved for an inquiry into the cause of the ill-success of the British arms. He was energetically supported by Burke, who showed that in all periods of our history such investigations had been made. The Administration, however, by the force of numbers, successfully resisted the motion, and as successfully carried against the same opposition subsidiary treaties with the Prince of Hesse and the Duke of Brunswick, for the hire of their troops to act against the Americans. Without scruple, the mercenary sword of the petty circles of Germany was let loose against men who had hitherto boasted of their English origin, and still spoke respectfully of their English allegiance; and thus they were also in self-defence driven to take that course which Burke so much deprecated, of requesting the assistance of foreign nations in this domestic quarrel.

He blamed Lord North for joking at having recourse to such a humiliating and impolitic expedient to put down rebellion. The news shortly afterwards came, that the siege of Quebec had been raised, that the invaders had been defeated, and that their brave General Montgomery had fallen. Burke pronounced an eloquent panegyric on the memory of this gallant soldier, drew a comparison between the victories of Lord North and those of Mr. Pitt, and showed that the expense of the whole American army of forty thousand men in the glorious

campaigns by which Canada had been conquered, was less than that which was required to maintain the eight thousand wretched, starved, and disgraced soldiers who were then cooped up in the single town of Boston. Fox followed Burke in eulogizing Montgomery. Lord North blamed them both for publicly praising a rebel whose death he said that he for one could not join in lamenting. Fox boldly retorted, that the term rebel, as applied to such an illustrious person, was no mark of disgrace; that they sat in the House of Commons and owed their Constitution to a rebellion; and that some of the greatest benefactors of mankind had in all ages been called rebels.* To this extreme had this sad Colonial dissension now arrived, that even Burke and his younger friend saw no disgrace in the defeat and death of those who were earnestly contending against England herself for the liberties of America.

It was a relief to Burke to turn his mind, even for a moment, from discussions on Militia Bills and the army extraordinaries, to those more beneficent objects of domestic administration which intemperate legislators seemed altogether putting out of sight. The prisons were full; and the Government, with the Colonies in rebellion, knew not what to do with the convicts. A scheme for making them work at home was framed. Two measures which had been revised by Blackstone were sent by the Under Secretary of State to Burke, for his private consideration. He appears totally to have disapproved of the plan, and to have expressed himself decidedly against any system for establishing penal labour in England.†

* Parl. Hist., vol. xviii. pp. 1239, 1240.

† Correspondence, vol. ii. pp. 92-95.

A few days afterwards he introduced a most humane measure, to prevent the plundering of ships wrecked on the British coasts. The practice then prevalent was a disgrace to any civilized country, and especially to a great commercial nation so much of whose wealth was on the seas, and whose interest it was to diminish as much as possible the risks attending marine enterprises. Both the philanthropist and the political economist might heartily co-operate in restraining the barbarity which permitted all property that was thrown by the waves on shore to be regarded as the lawful spoil of the first comers. On the same principle that the hundred in which a highway robbery was committed had to make compensation, Burke proposed to inflict a penalty on every hundred in which a wreck was plundered. To his astonishment he found his motion for the introduction of the measure opposed by Sawbridge, then Lord Mayor of the greatest commercial city in the world. The Bill was, however, permitted to be brought in; but it was received with little favour. Epithets were applied to this benevolent measure such as none of the wicked legislation for starving colonies and destroying provinces had occasioned. Some Members called it a cruel Bill; others, a profligate Bill; and one, a black Bill. It was thrown out on the second reading: forty-three gentlemen only voting for it, but even the majority only counted fifty-five.*

The divisions had grown smaller and smaller. One absorbing subject, of a personal nature, had for the time altogether monopolized the attention of the political and fashionable world. America and England, as well as Burke's Bill on Shipwrecks, were altogether neglected;

* Parl. Hist., vol. xviii. pp. 1298-1302.

while, from the Prime Minister to the humblest clerk in office, everybody thought only of the trial for bigamy of the profligate Amelia Chudley, who was at length found guilty of marrying the Duke of Kingston while legally, but secretly, married to the Earl of Bristol. How the abandoned woman looked in Westminster Hall, what dresses she wore, and what tears she shed as she was exposed to the withering invective of Dunning, were topics too exciting to leave room for any questions of imperial policy or domestic reformation.*

And yet the thunder of the Colonial guns, which at length compelled Sir William Howe to evacuate Boston, might with their terrible echo have made the most frivolous of legislators attend to this great subject of America. After suffering many hardships through the months of winter, finding suddenly, as in the case which produced the battle of Bunker's Hill, works thrown up that commanded both the town and camp, the British General was compelled, in March, to embark his troops, with some eighteen hundred of the inhabitants, and set sail for the dreary settlement of Halifax, as the only remaining refuge for the assertors of the British cause. With drums beating and colours flying, Washington entered Boston in triumph. The news reached England before Parliament adjourned. In a motion for placing America on the same footing as Ireland, Burke, with much indignation, reviewed the measures of the session, and called upon Lord North to show what had been accomplished. Millions had been voted, the land-tax had been increased, twenty thousand Germans had

* Walpole's *Collected Letters*, vol. v. p. 446. Letters to Sir Horace Mann (second series), vol. ii. p. 360. Burke's *Correspondence*, vol. ii. p. 102.

been hired to fight the battles of England, a hundred thousand Americans were in arms to oppose her, and all her Governors, from Halifax to Florida, had been forced to seek refuge on board her Royal master's ships of war. This, according to Burke, was the account Lord North had to give of his stewardship ; and all that his friends could do when questioned about American affairs on their return to the country, was to refer their constituents to the *Gazettes* as oracles of truth for panegyrics on General Howe's military qualifications, and the bravery of his soldiers.*

But there was no despondency in the Ministers or their supporters. They seemed to Burke, amid the disasters of their country, to be as proudly exultant as though they had accomplished great results both in Parliament and in America. From the joy depicted on the countenances of his political opponents on leaving town, no person, he said, could ever imagine that they had lost an empire. A revolution in the palace among those who were entrusted with the education of the Prince of Wales, and in the course of which even Dr. Markham for once in his life appeared in disgrace at Court, and resigned his office of preceptor, made more noise at home than the revolution in America just previous to the Declaration of Independence.† Dr. Markham however did not lose the favour of his Sovereign with the loss of his preceptorship ; for before the year closed he was, on the death of Dr. Drummond, made Archbishop of York.

About the same time as this revolution in the royal nursery, Wilkes experienced even a more impressive lesson

* *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xviii. p. 1354.

† *Correspondence*, vol. ii. p. 108.

of the mutability of mere vulgar popularity, and found, as Burke inculcated, that the shouting multitude of the Guildhall were as little to be trusted as princes. On Midsummer-day, Wilkes, for the second time, contested the election for the Chamberlainship of the City, and found himself abandoned by most of his former idolaters. The patriot and his leading followers had, in the heat of the popular frenzy, pledged themselves never to accept of any office whatever; and the members of the Rockingham party had been branded as insincere in their professions in favour of freedom, because they would not disclaim the fair objectsof political ambition. Wilkes was now reminded of his promise, and ignominiously defeated. Thus Burke had his revenge over those who had blamed his *Thoughts on the Causes of the Present Discontents*, as not enough liberal in its principles. A young friend of his, a Mr. John Bourke, who was a London merchant, interested in the African Company, and the intimate acquaintance and confidential correspondent of Philip Francis, then in India, sent him a letter that was published in the *Gazetteer*. It was signed *The Occasionalist*, and commented on the ingratitude of the citizens in rejecting the champion of the Middlesex elections at the time when they had the opportunity of rendering him easy and independent in his circumstances for life. Burke made some remarks upon the subject, criticized the letter, and gave some admirable advice to Mr. John Bourke and the young author. Those who had made the judgment of the multitude their standard of rectitude, and given promises to the prejudice of others, but which they never thought binding upon themselves, had no right to complain when the judgment of their own jury went against

them, and they found themselves held to their bond. Speaking of the mere populace of London, Burke finely asked, with a little internal satisfaction, “What inward resource has he, when turned out of courts, or hissed out of town-halls, who has made their opinions the only standard of what is right, and their favour the sole means of his happiness?” *

He indicated a more illustrious victim than even Wilkes, of this blind deference for the opinions of the hustings and the vestry. Lord Shelburne had on one occasion told him, without their conversation at all leading to the remark, that the people, meaning by the phrase the mere politicians of the City, were never in the wrong. Immediately afterwards Lord Shelburne and his friends, to the exquisite gratification of Burke, were driven from the Guildhall by their own unerring oracles of wisdom and justice. Between Lord Shelburne and Burke there had indeed never been much cordiality, and what little there might have once existed had, in the course of these last five years, gradually diminished. Chatham’s withdrawal from active political affairs might have been expected to unite more closely together all who disapproved of this American war. This was not the case. Burke and Lord Shelburne were now scarcely upon speaking terms, and on no Peer in Opposition had Burke so little influence as on this accomplished nobleman, whose great mansion in Berkeley-square, which had once been the residence of Lord Bute, became at length, through Shelburne’s enlightened munificence, the home of authors, statesmen, and philosophers. There came Barré and Dunning, the most eminent politicians of what was called the Shelburne party. There Priestley tranquilly

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 111.

made his chemical experiments, and Price his arithmetical calculations on the national debt. But in the political writings of these two eminent men on the American war, as they were published under Lord Shelburne's patronage, the same diametrical difference from Burke's settled and avowed principles may be as distinctly seen at this time as in their subsequent writings on the French Revolution. Dr. Price had recently published his *Observations on Civil Government*, in which, echoing the language of Chatham and Shelburne, he reviled Burke and the Rockingham party for the *Declaratory Act*. He had, as the most profound of political philosophers, been publicly thanked for the book by the Common Council of London, who presented to him the freedom of the City in a gold box.* Yet Dr. Price had quite forgotten that, if the Rockingham party had asserted the right of taxation theoretically to exist, it was the Government of his own patron that had revived it in practice. "His friends have so abused it," said Burke, "that this railing at the *Declaratory Act* of 1766 is but too natural. Let Dr. Price rail at this declaration, as those rail at free-will who have sinned in consequence of it." All the writers whom Shelburne patronized were in similar antagonism to Burke. The two statesmen from the first appear to have had a natural antipathy to each other, though party virulence applied to them both the common stigma of Jesuitism.

Learned, laborious, intelligent, thoroughly acquainted with foreign affairs and all diplomatic knowledge, an encourager of art, science, and literature, studiously polite and refined in his manners, overflowing in his courtesy to all men, Lord Shelburne, as a statesman, met with but one

* *Chronicle of the Annual Register, 1776.* p. 126.

insurmountable obstacle. He could never make people believe in his sincerity. He was popularly considered to be the personification of intrigue; his enemies called him Malagrida, the Portuguese Jesuit; and all who doubted whether the name was justly applied, were told to look at his features, on which, it was affirmed, duplicity was unmistakably written by the Divine Hand.*

As the rest of the world distrusted Lord Shelburne, so he distrusted Burke. This summer Garret Nagle again reminded his cousin of the agency to this nobleman's Irish estates, which he had requested him to solicit more than five years ago, but of which nothing more had been heard. Burke now replied that Lord Shelburne had been very polite to him, and very profuse in his offers of services; but that whenever he tried this ground in the most trifling manner, he had found it to fail beneath his feet; and that now the Earl did not even trouble himself to make any professions whatever. "With many eminent qualities," said Burke, "he has some singularities in his character. He is suspicious and whimsical, and perhaps if I stood better with him than I do, my recommendation would not have the greatest weight in the world."†

Garret Nagle wished Burke to pay a visit to the South of Ireland. In the same letter which shows us the unfavourable nature of his relations with this distinguished nobleman, that had afterwards so material an influence on the polities of England, Edmund regretted that he could not in this burning season refresh his eyes with the sight of the mountains, woods, and waters of Garret's neighbourhood. He had also during

* Wraxall's Historical Memoirs, vol. ii. p. 316.

† Letter in New Monthly Magazine, vol. xiv. p. 530.

the assizes to pay another visit to his constituents, and, with much hurry, fatigue, and excitement, to undergo another round of visits, dinners, and canvassing. One of his reasons for declining the invitation was, as he frankly informed his cousin, the expenses of the journey; and it is evident that his pecuniary circumstances were but indifferent.

They were even worse than he may have at that moment supposed. A few days afterwards he must have learnt that his appointment as agent for New York had been summarily cancelled, by the British Colonies having, in solemn resolution, and by a Declaration which was published to the world, openly separated themselves from the mother-country.

CHAPTER XXIII.

1776-1777.

SECESSION.

GENERAL Howe, after spending two months in Halifax, appeared before New York. His powerful armament seemed ready to sweep all resistance from the face of the earth. Landing a great body of troops on Staten Island, preparations were soon made for an attack on the American lines; and the fine city of New York seemed, both by friends and enemies, to be devoted to destruction. It was at this very time, when the two armies were in presence of each other and a great battle was daily expected, that the Declaration of Independence was adopted by the General Congress at Philadelphia, and publicly read, by the orders of Washington, at the head of each brigade of the American army. Admiral Lord Howe, who, with his brother, the General, had been associated in what was called the Commission of Peace under the Prohibitory Bill, but which was indeed justly regarded, both by Burke at home and the Colonists in America, as a mere power of granting pardons on submission, arrived just after this promulgation of independence: and the pacific proposition, such as it was, became, through the criminal delay of the Ministry, a practical satire. An attempt to open communications with Washington as a private indi-

vidual, but for imperial purposes, failed ; and the British Commissioners found themselves obliged most ungracefully to acknowledge him as Commander-in-chief of the American forces.

Cold steel and rifle-balls could now however be the only arbiters between England and the United States. The left of the American position on Long Island was turned by surprise during a summer's night ; a general attack was made the next morning ; and the Colonists were signally defeated with much slaughter, and to their great dismay. This victory, though highly honourable both to the British arms and to those of their mercenary allies, had most pernicious consequences to the Royal cause. Washington executed a most masterly retreat before the British commanders were aware of his intention ; but as soon as the people of England were informed of the battle that had been won, they became intoxicated with national pride and love of domination. Throwing all moderation to the winds, they revived the old reproaches of cowardice against the Americans, and talked of nothing but unconditional submission, in the style of Roman conquerors. Hitherto a minority indeed, but still a most respectable and influential minority, had made its voice heard against this most wicked and most foolish of all wars ; but now the representations of reason and moderation were silenced in the song of triumph. The success at Long Island appeared to Burke as the cause of many subsequent misfortunes. He ever regarded it as a victory that, in the scale of policy, was more calamitous than any defeat.*

With the Ministry, however, thoroughly embarked in the war, and the people indulging in sanguine hopes of

* Speech at Bristol, 1780.

success, the prospects of the Opposition were not improved. Among Lord Rockingham's friends a secession began to be spoken of as the most advisable policy. Charles Fox was at Wentworth in the autumn, and concurred in this design; but as soon as the news of the battle at Long Island arrived, he earnestly wrote to Lord Rockingham, from Newmarket, telling him that to withdraw from active opposition at such a time would seem like abandoning the Americans at the first approach of misfortune.*

Burke had the same sentiments. To him this disaster of the Colonists was no surprise. Even at the time when he heard of the evacuation of Boston he had foretold that their inexperienced enthusiasm would at first be found no match against the disciplined energy of veteran troops, and that in the course of the campaign they would very probably suffer some serious defeats. That hour of defeat having arrived, he was the last man to show signs of hesitation, or allow any misapprehension of his opinion.

Parliament was summoned for the thirty-first of October. On the day preceding the meeting, as though to give a colour to the future proceedings of the Legislature, a royal proclamation appeared, appointing a general fast, in order that the people of England might supplicate Providence to deliver them from the daring rebels who had assumed arbitrary powers; to open the eyes of those who had been deluded by specious falsehoods into acts of treason; and to turn the hearts of those who had wickedly produced the great calamities of this unnatural rebellion. His Majesty prayed for the conversion

* Letter to Lord Rockingham, in the Earl of Albemarle's Memoirs, vol. ii. p. 297.

of those who had cast off their allegiance to him, as a Spanish Inquisitor might be supposed to pray for the conversion of a miserable Jew at an auto-da-fé. The next day, while another immense armament was preparing in the dockyards in the evident apprehension of the interference of France and Spain in the American quarrel, the King requested the unanimity of all his loyal subjects in putting down that attempt at independence which the Colonists had now openly avowed; congratulated them on the success of his arms in the province of New York; and assured them that he still received professions of friendship from all foreign Powers.

The hope of unanimity, if it could have been seriously entertained, was soon disappointed. The debate is remarkable for having called forth an argumentative amendment from Burke's pen, of greater length than the proposed Address of the Government. It was a highly finished, eloquent, and lofty composition. It assured his Majesty that they beheld with inexpressible concern the minds of a very large and lately loyal portion of his people entirely alienated from his Government; but that such a revolt of a whole people could not have occurred without considerable misconduct in those entrusted with the direction of affairs. Measures had been pursued for the chastisement of an inconsiderable party of factious men, which had driven thirteen great provinces to despair. No hearing had been given either to the complaints or to the petitions of the Colonists. Even the Commission promised at the beginning of the last session had not been sent until seven months after its appointment, and until the loss of the only town in the provinces held by his Majesty's troops. Amid many disgraces and disasters, one single advantage having

however been obtained in New York, this success might have the happiest result in promoting a reconciliation between Great Britain and America, on principles of well-ascertained dependence and well-secured liberty. The Colonies should be regulated, but not destroyed. The principles which had produced these commotions being analogous to those that had given life to the British Constitution, were worthy of respect, and could never be extirpated by the sword in any portion of his Majesty's dominions without danger to the liberties of England.*

This representation was moved by Lord John Cavan-dish. The Ministers had little to say against it, and it was observed that they spoke no longer with their old confidence. Their boasts of subduing America in one campaign had failed, and even a great victory had not produced the slightest indications of submission. Fox made a most powerful and effective speech, and never in Burke's opinion spoke better. This was however the first occasion since his entrance into Parliament when Burke did not himself speak in the debate on the Ad-dress. He rose twice, but, waiting either for Thurlow or Wedderburne, whom he expected would reply to Fox, as neither of them showed fight, and as the position of the debate could not be improved, he judiciously main-tained silence. This amendment, or, as he said, sub-stitute for the Ministerial Address, was also moved by Lord Rockingham in the House of Lords,† and on the

* This amendment is given in Burke's Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 121, with the statement that "nothing further is known of it." But a re-ference to the Annual Register of 1777, and the Parliamentary History, will show clearly on what occasion it was moved.

† Parl. Hist., vol. xviii. p. 1392. Burke's Correspondence, vol. ii. pp. 127-130.

same evening converted into a protest by the Marquis and his noble friends.

Soon after this debate on the Address the news arrived, that the British troops had taken possession of New York. The Gazette spoke of victory: the conduct of the American army had, up to this time, been somewhat inglorious; and it seemed that the submission of the province of which Burke had been the agent must speedily ensue. An extraordinary proclamation from Lord Howe and his brother was published in one of the English morning papers, promising his Majesty's ready concurrence in the revisal of all Acts by which his colonial subjects might think themselves aggrieved. As the whole policy of the Government had hitherto been based on unconditional submission before granting pardons, the appearance of this document took the Opposition by surprise. Lord John Cavendish incredulously asked Lord North, whether this declaration was a genuine production. The Prime Minister replied in the affirmative. Lord John then, on the principle which Burke had always recommended to his friends, that, as the grievances of the Colonists had originated in measures passed by Parliament, so the foundation of every plan for reconciliation should also be laid in Parliament, moved that the House of Commons should at once resolve itself into a committee for revisal of all the Acts which had been prejudicial to America.

Burke seconded the motion. He requested Lord North to tell him, whether the instructions of the Commissioners went to the length of their declaration, and whether it did not hold out a promise on the part of the Crown, in respect to Acts of the Legislature, and thus appeared to lead instead of following Parliament? "The

text," said Burke, "is before us: where is the commentary?" Lord North readily replied, that he would not enter into a critical, literal, or philological interpretation of the passage in the Commissioners' declaration which had produced the motion; and he stoutly assured Burke that the Government had in no degree altered their opinions; nor would, while their authority was disputed, relax in their efforts to maintain the claims of the country. According to him, the Ministry, Parliament, and the Commissioners had acted on one consistent rule of conduct, and he peremptorily refused to accede to any part of the motion.

In one respect, answered Fox, who continued the debate, the Administration had doubtless been consistent. They had ever manifested a steady and uniform contempt of the House of Commons, from which all information was withheld, and its consent pledged by the Government without the slightest communication. Wedderburne, who had been, to Burke's regret, silent the other evening, now gave him the opportunity of giving vent to thoughts and feelings which had only become more intense from having been so long suppressed.

He delivered a most brilliant and vehement invective. A presentation copy of Watson's History of Philip II. had been sent to him by the learned author. This book, treating of the insurrection in the Netherlands, that had so many coincidences with the American rebellion, was seasonably published, and excited, perhaps for this reason, more attention than was justly due to it on account of its merely literary merits. Burke showed from it that the morose Spaniard had never treated the people of the Netherlands in such a cruel and arbitrary manner as the Ministers, with the sanction of

Parliament, had treated the Americans. James II. had also offered to treat with his subjects, even while they had abjured their allegiance. Even Louis XV. had received remonstrances from his Parliaments, openly denying his right to powers he had constantly exercised. The Government, however, refused to treat unless the Declaration of Independence was revoked, and had appointed a solemn fast-day for the people to go blasphemously to the altar of peace, with war and vengeance in their hearts. Burke concluded with denouncing such a profane use of national devotion for political purposes ; and exhibited, in the energy of his language and the fervour of his manner, all those indications of extreme warmth in which it afterwards became his habit to indulge when he discussed questions that powerfully aroused the keen susceptibility of his generous nature.*

He perhaps, on this occasion, spoke with more indignation, from the consciousness that months might elapse before he should again address the House. The Rockingham party only counted forty-seven in the division on this motion ; and from the time of its rejection they carried into practice a partial secession, which Sir George Savile and others of their most respectable band had long recommended. They acted in the most marked manner. They attended to the private business in a morning ; but as soon as the business of the Government came on, they made their usual bows to the Speaker, and left the House.† There was, however, as little unanimity in this proceeding as in any other proposed among the Opposition. Some Members were only more assiduous during the absence of Burke

* Parl. Hist., vol. xviii. pp. 1441-1445.

† Annual Register, 1777, p. 48.

and his friends, and thus the beneficial effect of their withdrawal from the House was in some measure prevented. Business now went on rapidly, with few amendments and scarcely any debate. All the pressing demands on the purse of the nation were readily granted. The House adjourned for a long recess on the thirteenth of December, the day on which his Majesty's loyal subjects crowded the churches to pray for Divine aid against the wicked American rebels.

For dinner on that day Dr. Brocklesby sent Burke a cod-fish. The family made it swim in port to the health of the Doctor; and Burke assured this old school friend that it was consumed, as he wished it to be, with all possible execration of uncharitable fast and hypocritical prayer.* This was in the same frank and cordial spirit which distinguished all their intercourse. He addressed Brocklesby familiarly as, My dear Doctor; and did not hesitate to make, as his habit was, a playful pun at the generous physician's expense. There was in some notoriety a quack called Dr. Rock. Burke one day assured Brocklesby that his name was also really Dr. Rock. The Doctor looked astonished and somewhat annoyed. The statesman undertook to demonstrate his assertion according to algebra, and immediately produced the equation: *Brock less b = Rock.*†

Though he wrote and talked cheerfully to Brocklesby, the political circumstances of this recess were to him more than usually grave. The news received up to the close of the year from the other side of the Atlantic was decidedly unfavourable to the Americans. Washington had commenced the campaign under the most favour-

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 131.

† See Croker's Boswell, edit. 1848, p. 776.

able auspices ; but in all important operations had appeared as yet unfortunate. Murmurs had risen against him even among the Colonists, and were scarcely suppressed even among his dearest friends in arms. His patriotic and confident army of twenty-five thousand men had dwindled away to some few thousand badly clothed, badly armed, and badly organized troops, who were quite unable to meet a regular army in the field.

The Jerseys had been overrun. The broad and rapid stream of the Delaware had only prevented General Howe from advancing on Philadelphia ; with the first frosts, the river would become passable ; and the great capital, where the Congress had so long held its sittings, where the Declaration of Independence had been passed, and where, on the fourth of October, a scarcely less important document, which was in truth a general bond of confederation among the different Colonies, had been signed, might be in the possession of the Crown. General Charles Lee, on whose military experience the Americans placed so much reliance, had been taken prisoner. Arnold had been beaten on Lake Champlain, and his flotilla, by which he had hoped to prevent, as by a naval barrier, the advance of the British forces from Canada, had been destroyed. So dark appeared the prospect of the Colonists at the beginning of the winter, that the memorable voyage of Franklin to France was construed into an ignominious flight from the ruin of his country's cause.

Burke understood better the meaning of Franklin's appearance at Paris. Conjecturing truly that he had come to negotiate with France for effectual assistance to the Americans, and believing that at the moment no direct promise of support could be obtained, though

American privateers, in defiance of remonstrances, were fitting out of French ports, and the Court, nobility, and philosophers openly avowed their sympathies with the Colonists, he expected that, failing in his first effort, the Pennsylvanian would then endeavour, through the British Ambassador, to come to some terms with the Crown. Burke thought of crossing the Channel and confidentially consulting Franklin on the nature and object of his instructions, and on the possibility of getting Congress to declare in favour of a plan of reconciliation, on the basis of the Bill he had proposed in the last session, and which had been supported by no inconsiderable minority. The Duke of Portland approved of this intended expedition; but as many of their other friends discountenanced it, the design was abandoned.

Burke's abilities, both as a statesman and a writer, were also, at the commencement of 1777, engaged in maturing another project, in which the whole party were to take a common responsibility. Without having formally seceded from Parliament, as they had discontinued their usual attendance, and as every day the calamitous nature of the war became more obvious, Burke and Lord Rockingham thought that some extraordinary proceeding might be necessary to rouse the people to the danger which was impending over the Empire. They thought of presenting to the King an elaborate Address, signed by all their friends in both Houses, detailing the reasons of their constant opposition to the war, and the dreadful consequences to the Constitution which, as then conducted, it would certainly produce. This paper was, of course, written carefully by Burke; and, having been read by some of those who were to adopt it, was, on the sixth of January, sent by him to Lord Rockingham, with

a long letter, entering into the circumstances of affairs and the reasons both for and against so strong and unusual a proceeding as the delivery of this Address at the foot of the Throne. He fully approved of a complete secession and the presentation of the Address, if the whole party agreed in these two parts of one plan, and if the general secession was regarded as a necessary act of vigour, and not, as some had spoken of it, as an opportunity for ease and retirement. Such a secession was a strictly constitutional proceeding. It was, of course, based on the supposition that all the ordinary means of resistance to bad measures having failed, and an Opposition in such circumstances being rather a convenience to a Government than any hindrance to an injurious policy, it was expedient to wait for a more convenient opportunity to act vigorously; and also to intimate unmistakably to a Minister that, while in the spring-tide of popular frenzy he might pursue his evil course without impediment, absence of criticism did not imply agreement in principle, and that the day of reckoning might one day come, when he should not be permitted to plead the sanction of a majority as a justification of his incapacity and folly. All the consequences of the Address, on the private fortunes and reputations of those who signed it, Burke pointed out to his noble friend: that whatever they did should be done deliberately and zealously, though counter-addresses from the people and the two Houses of Parliament, prosecutions for libel, votes for impeachment, or Bills of pains and penalties should meet them in the path which he, with an encouraging voice, recommended them to follow. Another Address, to the American Colonists, which, with the Address to the Throne, was also written by

Burke, and was intended to be published by the party, that the moderate portion of the Colonists should not believe that they had no friends in the English Legislature, nor consider themselves fully justified in seeking foreign aid.*

These Addresses were never employed for their purposes. The appeal to the Colonists must certainly have come too late. The employment of the Hessians had gone far, with other oppressive proceedings, to root out of the American heart all the sentiment of loyalty to George III. Even at the time when Burke was writing the two papers, events were occurring which rendered them useless.

The first gleam of success had visited the American arms. Washington had attacked an outpost at Trenton, taken three brigades of Hessians prisoners, and revived the courage and hopes of his countrymen. The tide had turned, carrying away all prospects of a happy reconciliation between England and her revolted Colonies. The Americans nearly regained the ground they had lost in the Jerseys. The invasion of Pennsylvania was prevented for the season. Being satisfied with maintaining their positions in New York, the British Commander gave his resolute adversary time to reorganize an army that had been nearly disbanded; and the day-star of American Independence began to shine steadily and brightly through the clouds in which it had recently seemed about to disappear for ever.

This change of fortune was unforeseen. Burke had looked forward with the most gloomy anticipations. While he believed that it was impossible permanently to subdue the Colonists, he had still thought that open resist-

* Burke's Works, vol. vi.

ance would be easily put down. Nor, on fair consideration, can this distrust of the power of the United States to achieve their independence, at the beginning of 1777, be regarded as an exception to his general far-sighted sagacity. Even Washington, in his private correspondence with his brother, had declared that he thought the game was up; as, at this critical moment, had the Royal army been commanded by a General of energy and perseverance, it certainly might have been. With the advantages that the British troops had obtained, and while the raw militia of the provinces were defeated and disheartened, a soldier like a Clive or a Wellington, at the head of such a well-equipped, a veteran, and a victorious army, would have brought the war to a close with the campaign, and have compelled Washington to undertake his meditated retreat across the Alleghanies. But General Howe, satisfied with the victory of Long Island and the possession of New York, went into luxurious winter-quarters, in which he remained for six months. The auspicious moment for the British arms passed away, to return no more; and Burke's anxious forebodings were for once unfulfilled.

France and Spain were arming; but the intoxicated English people only thought of addressing the Throne on the successes recently achieved. Every art of intrigue and deception was practised in Bristol, to induce the city ostensibly to declare in favour of the war, and to disavow her brilliant representative. In this momentary sunshine of delusive victory, the Tories in the town awoke into vigorous life, and an Address was carried, congratulating his Majesty, and reflecting strongly on Burke and the Opposition. His friends were much annoyed. To counteract the tendency of the Tory Ad-

dress, he drew up another Petition, and was writing to his Quaker friend, Richard Champion, on the subject, when he was told an alarming report that Bristol was in flames and in danger of being burnt to the ground.*

The rumour was true. One morning, when the tide was low and the ships were lying crowded together almost in front of the quay, several fires broke out. They were at once attributed to an incendiary. Shortly afterwards a more dangerous conflagration occurred, in which several warehouses were destroyed. The town was thrown into the greatest excitement. Patrols paraded the streets at night. Troops poured in from Gloucester. Each citizen looked upon his neighbour with suspicion. The Tories inveighed against the Whigs as being the agents in this diabolical design, from their traitorous sympathies with the Americans; and the Whigs accused the Tories of maliciously planning the conflagration in order to throw the odium on their political opponents. Singular fireworks were discovered. A stranger of peculiar appearance was remembered to have been seen lurking about at the time of the fires. He was now nowhere to be found; and in his lodgings some extraordinary combustible materials had been left. As Member for the city, Burke wrote to the Mayor, offering fifty guineas out of his private purse, for the apprehension of the offenders; but in his correspondence with Champion he hinted very intelligibly his doubts whether the fires had not been the result of accident rather than malice.

Yet the hand of the incendiary had really kindled the flames in Bristol. All England was soon afterwards deeply interested in the account of the daring exploits

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 136.

of James Aitken, or, as he was popularly called, John the Painter. He was a dark, melancholy, and unsocial enthusiast, who had led a rambling, dissipated life, working at his trade, robbing his employers, or cheating recruiting sergeants of the bounty for enlistment, as his inclinations or his purposes served. Making his way to America, he had there imbibed all the prejudices of the Colonists against his native country, and had conceived the project of inflicting upon her some fatal injury. By burning the royal dockyards and the great maritime towns, he would by one blow paralyze the right arm of England, and destroy the nursery of all her strength and greatness. He made several attempts at Portsmouth, and, in his flight from the town, saw the flames of the rope-house shooting into the sky, and exultingly imagined that the first portion of his evil work had been effectually done. Twice he climbed the walls of the dockyards at Plymouth, but, owing to the nearness of the watchmen, was obliged hurriedly to take flight. Plundering and rioting wherever he went and opportunity offered, he at length reached Bristol, and threw the whole city into commotion by the repeated efforts to destroy both ships and town. But the adventurous career of John the Painter was drawing to its close. In the hemp-house at Portsmouth one of his combustible machines had been found; the suspicions of the authorities were aroused; and a reward was advertised for the apprehension or surrender of the vagrant mechanic, who it was remembered had been in the rope-house before the fire, and had been seen frequently prowling about the yards. While busily engaged in breaking into silversmiths' shops and committing robberies on the highway, he was suddenly arrested for burglary at Oldham, and,

being recognized, was conveyed thence for examination to London. He parried all interrogatories with extraordinary shrewdness. Though committed to prison, there was, in the opinion of the best judges, not evidence strong enough to carry a conviction. A man of the name of Baldwin, who was also a painter, and had pursued his business in America, had also, during the examination, truly sworn that he had no knowledge of the criminal. He was designedly permitted to visit him in prison. By degrees he gained his confidence, and drew from him a statement of his recent career, which, being confirmed by other evidence, was unexpectedly produced against him by his false friend in the witness-box, on the day of trial; and John the Painter, after making a regular confession, was hanged on a gallows sixty feet high, at the dockyard gates of Portsmouth, near the ruins of the rope-house which he had burnt down.*

Burke's scepticism at the time of the Bristol conflagrations was shared by most of his friends. Even in February, after the reassembling of Parliament, and while the incendiary was awaiting his trial, Fox alluded to the suspicion of John the Painter having attempted to burn Bristol as a monstrous fable, in the course of an energetic opposition to a Bill which the Government had introduced to enable them to detain in prison all who were charged with, or suspected of, committing treason in America or on the high seas, or of being guilty of what they denominated piracy. This was another of those unhappy measures which it had so long been the policy of the King and his Ministers to recommend, and which sought to make war on the Colonies, not so much by the thun-

* Howell's State Trials, vol. xx. pp. 1318-68. Annual Register, 1777, p. 28, and Appendix to the Chronicle, p. 249.

ders of artillery as by the *brutum fulmen* of Parliament. It was a partial suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act ; it called men pirates who, at the blackest, could only be looked upon as rebels ; and thus, by a strained interpretation of the Common Law, sought to debase morally the criminality of acts for which the legal penalty remained the same.

On the subject of this Bill an anxious meeting of the party was held at Lord Rockingham's. The affair appeared so decidedly unconstitutional, and the importance of the question so great, that some of those who had hitherto approved of the secession were eager to resume their places in Parliament and strongly resist the measure. Lord Rockingham's more particular friends, however, the Duke of Portland, Lord John Cavendish, and Burke, thought that nothing could be more absurd than to return at the first favourable moment to open opposition, after having publicly discontinued their attendance on American affairs. This difference of opinion was not reconciled. Burke went down to Beaconsfield. Fox, ably supported by Dunning, took the lead in opposing the Bill, and succeeded in modifying some of its most arbitrary features. Even Sir George Savile, who had the most strongly advocated a general secession, also on the third reading came down again to the House of Commons, and, by speaking and voting against the proposed Act, deprived the seceding Members of his countenance ; and of course contributed to make the step they had conscientiously and deliberately taken appear not only futile, but ridiculous.*

Until this session, Burke had been so regularly in the

* Walpole's Journal : Memoirs and Correspondence of Fox, vol. i. p. 154.

House, and had laboured so assiduously day by day, that his absence appeared very singular to those who knew not the reasons for this change in his conduct. His political enemies in Bristol misrepresented it, and all the supporters of the war spared no means to damage him in public estimation. Feeling that both his constituents and the great body of the people disapproved of the secession, and that it did require some explanation, as soon as the Habeas Corpus Bill was passed, he began to write an elaborate Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol, which was finished and sent down to Champion in manuscript early in April. Burke had shown it previously to Lord Rockingham, Sir George Savile, and Charles Fox, and as they thought it would do service, it was immediately afterwards published. Few people could refuse their tribute of admiration to the lofty thoughts, noble sentiments, and glowing language of this Letter, addressed nominally to the Sheriffs of Bristol, but really to the whole British people in the gloomy hours of civil war.

Two years had passed since he had appealed to the public through the press. This Letter was therefore a kind of miscellaneous reply to all the charges made against himself and his friends during the eventful interval which had elapsed since the publication of his speech on Conciliation. The objections to the Habeas Corpus Act; the rebuke of those who had rejoiced in the victories of their foreign mercenaries and at the slaughter of names which were household words at every English hearth; the disclaimer of any exultation in the glory of the German Colonel Rahl at the White Plains, and of the German General Kniphausen at Fort Washington; the indignation at the fury with which the

vehement supporters of the Court displayed against all who showed the slightest sentiment of moderation; the reply to the extreme abstract theories in favour of freedom in the exact manner of similar paragraphs in the *Reflections on the French Revolution*, and directed against the doctrines of the very same individuals, Priestley and Price; the defence against them and others of the general supremacy of the Imperial Legislature, as much for the sake of the Colonies themselves as for the common interests of the empire, and of which the gradual separation in interest and principle of the southern from the northern States, and the want of a recognized mediator in the dissensions which threaten to rend the Union asunder, have since then abundantly shown the wisdom; the bold avowal of his sympathies for the Colonial cause, and his defence of himself and his friends in their secession, and as a party; are all subjects that had originated in recent events, on which he must have thought long without an opportunity of delivering his opinions, and of which this Letter to the friendly Sheriffs of Bristol was made the appropriate vehicle.

It was scarcely out of the press when the secession which it was principally intended to explain and justify had ceased to exist, and Burke again stood forth as the warm opponent of the Ministry in the House of Commons.

Another heavy debt on the Civil List had been incurred. For two sessions a Message from the Throne on this subject had been expected. But it had however been delayed by the destruction of the tea in Boston harbour, the bloodshed at Lexington, the battle of Bunker's Hill, and the heavy expenses at the commencement of the war. As the last campaign had however been apparently

successful, and the Ministers and the people now entertained confident hopes of subduing America, the opportunity was considered more favourable, and the necessity irresistible, for applying to the faithful Commons again, as in 1769, to relieve his Majesty from the debts he had contracted, and to obtain a further supply. On the ninth of April, Lord North brought down this Message to the House. He showed this time what on the former occasion he had defied, some sense of the constitutional functions of the Commons; for the Message was accompanied by a bundle of papers and some formal statements of accounts, such as in the season of the Middlesex elections had been pertinaciously withheld. The Royal intimation of pecuniary difficulties was referred to a Committee of Supply. As this was not business relating to America, and as Royal necessities, like those of other people, have the usual accompaniment of popular prejudice against them, the opportunity was thought favourable by the Rockingham party to resume their duties in Parliament, which some of their best friends and all their jealous enemies thought they ought never to have relinquished. On the sixteenth of April, the day appointed for the Committee of Supply, Lord John Cavendish, who, as the nominal leader, generally made the motions of the party, moved the discharge of the Order that the accounts might be referred to a Committee of the whole House, for a deliberate inquiry into the causes of the deficiency, and the best means of avoiding it for the future.

Burke strongly attacked Lord North. Entering into a comparison between the relative splendour and expenses in the reigns of William III. and George II., he argued that in Royal magnificence both these Princes, with less money, made more show than George III.

He argued, that while the grants so lavishly given were neither hoarded nor seemed to be spent, they were employed in purposes that the Ministers durst not avow. Honest Alderman Sawbridge afterwards expressed plainly what Burke had only significantly implied. The revenues of the Civil List, he strongly asserted, had been spent in corruption. Even pensions had been given to Members of Parliament during the Royal pleasure. Loud cries of “Name! Name! Take down his words!” and other indications of disapprobation, came from the Ministerial benches. Some persons called upon him to repeat his statements. The worthy alderman appeared quite confounded by the uproar. Burke came to his assistance. The excuses he made were gravely ironical, but could not openly be refused. The fashionable term on such occasions, he said, was “influence.” But the alderman, being a plain citizen, had not graduated in polite arts so much encouraged at the West End of the town. He had erred through ignorance, and was to be pitied. What a refined courtier might call influence, the alderman had, with his gross mode of expression, most improperly called corruption.*

Lord John Cavendish’s motion was of course rejected. There were other debates, but the Ministerial majority was sure; the debts were to be paid; and another hundred thousand pounds a year was added to the allowance for the Civil List.

An unexpected incident however disturbed the satisfaction of the jobbers at this increase of the fund for corruption. On Wednesday, the seventh of May, the Speaker presented the Bill for the better support of the Royal household to the King, and made an emphatic

* Parl. Hist., vol. xix. p. 151.

speech, hoping that as the Commons, when their constituents were labouring under such grievous burdens, had immediately granted both a liberal supply and a great additional revenue, his Majesty would apply wisely what they had given liberally. Confusion sat on the countenances of the courtiers. Even the usual serene expression of the royal features appeared somewhat disturbed at this equivocal address. The Opposition however stole a march upon the Ministers; and on that day had the thanks of the House voted to Sir Fletcher Norton, with a request that he would publish his speech.

Two days afterwards Rigby fiercely reviled the Speaker. As the leader of the King's friends, he treated the Chair with the utmost contempt, and disclaimed for himself and for the majority of the House all participation in the sentiments expressed by Sir Fletcher Norton to the Sovereign. Sir Fletcher Norton, feeling that he would be supported by the Opposition, and rather proud of the popularity he had just acquired, appealed to the Journals of the House for the thanks which the Commons had officially conveyed to him for the very conduct which his loud antagonist so coarsely reprehended. Rigby interrupted him, and in his bullying style declared that the Speaker had no more right to respect than any other Member, and that he would not bow to his authority. The Ministers on the Treasury bench looked uneasy at the intemperance of the doughty Paymaster, who appeared to take a malicious pleasure in humiliating the first gentleman of England.

Burke was in the House; but, having lost his voice through hoarseness, could not speak at all. His pen, however, being still at the service of his friends, he drew up a resolution, affirming that the Speaker did with just and

proper energy express the zeal of the Commons for the support of the honour and dignity of the Crown in circumstances of great national expense. This resolution he handed to Fox, who directly moved it in an animated speech. A curious debate ensued. Sir Fletcher, constitutionally weak and timid, would have retreated from the lofty position he had at first taken up. The Opposition, however, held him firm to his post ; the resolution was carried ; and Rigby's intended censure, to the great discomfiture of himself and his King's friends, ended in another indorsement of the Address by the House of Commons, and another vote of thanks to the Speaker. Sir Fletcher Norton appeared for once in his life as a kind of popular hero, though there was as little of the sturdy democrat in his composition as could well be imagined.*

A Bill for the better security of the Dockyards was next disposed of. To this matter, as originating in the diabolical designs of John the Painter, Burke had given much of his attention ; but he had not recovered from his hoarseness when there were made, in the discussion on the Dockyard Bill, some remarks on the criminal law, illustrating the brutality which he and Sir William Meredith, on this question always fighting side by side, endeavoured to remove.

At the time when war with Spain was thought to be imminent on the subject of the Falkland Isles, the husband of a young and beautiful woman was taken under a press-warrant for the service of the State. She had hitherto lived in comfort, but was then left without support. After her goods had been seized for debt, she,

* Parl. Hist. vol. xix. pp. 227-234. Burke's Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 155.

with two little children, and being herself only nineteen years of age, was thrown destitute into the streets. To save her offspring from starving, she went into a shop on Ludgate-hill, and taking some coarse linen off the counter, attempted to conceal it under her cloak. The shopman saw the theft; she laid the article down again; but was hurried off to gaol, and received the usual sentence of death. She pleaded the seizure of her husband by the press-gang, her own destitute condition through this act of the Government, her children left without shelter, without clothes, and without bread. The officers of the parish testified that her story was true. Shoplifting had, however, been very prevalent lately in Ludgate-street, and, much to the satisfaction of the tradesmen in the neighbourhood, this poor mother, frantic with despair, and with her younger child sucking at her breast as she went to Tyburn, was remorselessly executed. Members seemed far from surprised or indignant on being told by Meredith of this atrocious murder, done under the forms of justice and covered over with the judge's ermine and the prelate's lawn.*

The model-judge and the model-bishop of that day, Lord Mansfield and Dr. Markham, the new Archbishop of York, were only too busy in ministering to their Sovereign's prejudices, by upholding the justice of the American war, and reviling those who resisted that iniquitous folly.

The Archbishop had recently published a sermon delivered by him before the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. As though to show his gratitude to the King for his incessant patronage, this sermon vehemently attacked the Dissenters, and bitterly reviled all

* Speech of Sir William Meredith, Parl. Hist. vol. xix. p. 237.

the parties in Opposition as factious. Some remarkable passages were particularly directed against Burke and the defence he had made of political connections. It was one of the worst political homilies ever preached in the pulpit by a courtly Archbishop. Burke thought it most imprudent; and Grafton, Chatham, and Shelburne denounced it in the House of Lords as subversive of Revolution principles. Some of the very charges which Dr. Markham had once, in a private letter, thought himself justified in making against Burke, were on a great occasion, when Lord Chatham once more appeared among the Peers and made a motion against a further prosecution of the American war, brought against the bishop himself, and in his presence, by these eminent statesmen, who spoke of him as another Sacheverell, and as a most dangerous person to have been entrusted with the education of youth. Lord Shelburne even boldly attributed Dr. Markham's dismissal from the preceptorship of the Prince of Wales to the unconstitutional doctrines which the divine had been found to entertain. The schoolmaster having reached such a high position in the Church that he could not easily get further, and therefore having nothing more to fear or to hope from great noblemen, haughtily bid defiance to his assailants; and he who had hitherto looked with such veneration on rank and wealth, declared bluntly that he would not be dictated to by the proudest Peer in the land. Lord Shelburne again insisted that the Archbishop had desecrated the pulpit by making it the medium of politics, that he had advanced most unconstitutional doctrines, and that the greatest act of magnanimity the King had ever committed, was the removal from the tuition of his son a man who would not suffer the word *Liberty* to be pro-

nounced without a qualification. This altercation had assumed a most serious aspect when Lord Mansfield, by rising to speak, made a diversion in favour of his mitred friend, and brought the discussion back to Chatham's motion.*

In the House of Lords now, as at all times, Chatham's eloquence produced but little effect. His motion was negatived. He was no longer the Chatham of 1766, still less the William Pitt of older times. His rare powers of oratory and statesmanship, which had so long shone forth amid the obscurities with which they were surrounded, though retaining to the last much of their original splendour, were approaching to their final eclipse.

While he, at the close of the session, revived the topic of Colonial Affairs in the Upper House, by Opposition in the Commons, the subject of America was studiously eschewed. Those who had counselled the late secession were in no haste to revive useless discussions, and demonstrate publicly the inutility of their resolutions; and the Ministers, promising great results from the campaign about to commence, looked to future events and the successes of their military and naval commanders for a justification of their policy. In this interregnum a debate on affairs in another part of the world excited much interest, and diversified the barren discussions of the season in the more popular assembly.

Since the passing of the Regulating Act, little had been said on the business of the East India Company. The effects of that measure and of the unsystematic and unguarded interference of the Ministers in the administration of India, were slowly developing themselves. Tan-

* Parl. Hist. vol. xix. p. 351. Chatham Correspondence, vol. iv. p. 438.

jore had been, in particular, sold to the Nabob of Arcot, Mehemet Aly, the great broker in Eastern principalities, whose name has been most unenviably immortalized by Burke. The Rajah, with the consent of the servants of the Company, was violently deposed, and his kingdom and treasures seized by the enterprising Nabob. The rulers at home, however, disapproving of this proceeding, sent out Lord Pigot, who had formerly distinguished himself highly in defence of this settlement as Governor and President of Madras, with full powers to restore the deposed Prince to his ancestral throne. By mortgaging the revenues of Tanjore and borrowing large sums of money, the vigilant Nabob of Arcot secured the Council of Civil Servants at Madras in his interest. On his arrival in the province, Lord Pigot found himself thwarted by the Council and even by the Commander-in-Chief. The new Governor suspended two of the most obnoxious Members, and placed the General under arrest. But, by a secret cabal of the suspended Members, aided by the Second in Command of the Troops, he was himself deposed, thrown into prison, and even his life threatened. These strong measures of the Council at Madras received the approbation of Hastings at Calcutta; but at home they excited equal astonishment and indignation. Resolutions were passed in the Court of Directors, restoring Lord Pigot to his government, suspending the most prominent actors in the violent change of authority, and appointing a new Council and a new Commander-in-Chief. Lord Pigot himself did not escape uncensured; but hitherto his friends boasted that he had completely triumphed over his enemies. The whole influence of Government was however exerted to reverse this victory; and a revolution as sudden as that

in Madras occurred in Leadenhall-street. Three resolutions were carried, recalling home, under the pretence of impartiality, Lord Pigot, his supporters, and his opposers.

The noble Governor's friends complained strongly of this inconsistency, and introduced the subject into the House of Commons. The leading members of the Administration did not appear prominently to defend the recent resolutions of the Court of Directors; but the great orators of the Opposition warmly took up Lord Pigot's cause. Their object was to nullify the three last resolutions of Leadenhall-street, and to rescue Lord Pigot from unmerited disgrace; and their strong tide of matchless eloquence, on a theme comparatively insignificant, burst like a deluge over the devoted Ministerial benches. Fox, in particular, descended so finely on the virtues and abilities of the unfortunate Governor, and was so keenly pointed in his observations on the conduct of his enemies, that he extorted demonstrations which were quite extraordinary, irregular, and unprecedented.* The close of every glowing period was greeted with loud cries of "Bravo!" and violent clapping of hands. Henry Dundas, in replying to this speech, stigmatized the testimonies of approbation it had called forth, as theatrical and indecent.

Burke, rising to support his friend, was met by Mr. Wombwell, a chairman of the Company, who had previously spoken, and professed to give the House a most interesting explanation. Amid the impatience of the House, and especially of Burke, this stolid official insisted on the Clerk reading paper after paper of petty details. After the extraordinary excitement which Fox

* Parl. Hist. vol. xix. p. 283.

had kindled, Mr. Wombwell's bale of Indian papers produced a dreary contrast; but they were remorselessly droned in the ears of weary senators until Burke could bear the tiresome infliction no longer. Starting up, he said, "It is impossible to contend further, as the honourable gentleman is in possession. I am content to wait until all the heavy folios now on the table are read through; and, to prepare myself for the task, I shall send for my nightcap." Other Members were as fatigued as himself, and, altogether disregarding Mr. Wombwell, called on Burke to proceed with his speech. He too eulogized Lord Pigot, and showed that the dislike he had evinced to Hastings, on his appointment as Governor-General under the Regulating Act, was not extinguished, but rather gathering strength. If, as he asked, all the members of a Government should indiscriminately be recalled, on the principle of the three resolutions which were to be enforced against Lord Pigot in Madras, why then should not Hastings and his Council be recalled, since the war of faction was raging amongst them in Bengal, and they were publicly accusing each other of the most enormous crimes?* The resolutions of the Court of Directors, notwithstanding the eloquence of the Opposition, were not reversed by the House of Commons; and the despatches, with the final decision of the Company, were soon ready to be sent to their servants on the coast of Coromandel.

With these despatches William Burke appears suddenly to have taken the opportunity of going to the East. The world had recently not gone very favourably with Edmund's friend. The petition on which he counted for his election as Member of Haslemere had

* Parl. Hist. vol. xix. p. 284.

been decided against him ; and since then William had remained out of Parliament. His dealings in Indian stock had been most unfortunate ; and both he and Richard Burke found their pecuniary circumstances still the reverse of prosperous. In the language of Change Alley, Richard, from his losses, was regarded as a lame duck, and, instead of Dick Burke, was called Duck Burke. Lord Verney, William's former patron, was also still considerably embarrassed by the unsuccessful issue of their joint speculations. It has even been said, that about this time Lord Verney brought an action against Edmund himself, as the only one of the family possessing any property, to oblige him to defray their share of the losses the nobleman had sustained ; that Burke made an affidavit denying his liability ; and that much obloquy was raised against him for clearing himself in this manner from such a claim.* I have already stated how easily the circumstances of the Burkes might be confounded ; how, without his sanction, Edmund's name might be brought into transactions of which he was himself altogether ignorant ; and how, at the very time when on a former occasion he was supposed to have been speculating in Indian stock, his own voluntary declaration, in the most expressive words, contradicted this general assertion. If the representation that has been given of this lawsuit be even correct, which however I have never been able to ascertain, those only who thought him a man not to be believed on his oath, could think it scandalous in him to relieve himself from responsibility by this solemn affirmation. And certainly but just before this period of his life, and long after Lord Verney's affairs had suffered by his speculations, they continued

* Bisset.

on the best of terms ; and Burke used so much exertion at the last dissolution of Parliament to secure Lord Verney's re-election for Buckinghamshire, when his interest in the county was thought to be attacked by Lord Temple, that the Duke of Richmond gave him a very intelligible rebuke for his warm importunity in favour of his noble friend.*

William Burke had however been most unlucky. Edmund deeply sympathized with his misfortunes, and on his determining to go to India, wrote a most earnest recommendation to Francis, of his friend's interests. In penning that epistle, all William's devotion to himself was in his mind, the first introduction to Lord Rockingham, the election for Wendover, and the resignation of the office of Under Secretary of State, rather than desert Edmund and the Rockingham party. Such considerations, combined with the reminiscences of their early companionship in studies, travels, and amusements, communicated more than usual warmth and energy to this characteristic letter. "Indemnify me, my dear Sir," wrote Burke, "as well as you can, for his loss, by contributing to the fortune of my friend, whom I have tenderly loved, highly valued, and continually lived with, in an union not to be expressed, quite since our boyish years. Bring him home with you, and at his ease, under the protection of your opulence. You know what his situation has been, and what things he might have surely kept and infinitely increased, if he had not had those feelings which make a man worthy of fortune. Remember that he asks those favours which nothing but his sense of honour prevented his having it in his power to bestow." Fortified with this document, and with

* Correspondence, vol. i. p. 484.

another from John Burke, the London merchant whose name recently appeared before the House of Commons as one of the petitioning members for the African Company, William Burke, shortly after the close of the session, set out overland on his adventurous expedition to the East, taking Paris by the way.

Late in August he arrived at Madras. Lord Pigot, on whose protection he had founded some hopes, had expired ; Rumbold, his appointed successor, had not yet come from England ; and all the affairs of the settlement were in the greatest confusion. Without any appointment, William Burke was placed under these circumstances in a very unenviable position. He wrote to Francis at Calcutta, enclosing the two letters of his kinsman, and informing him of his precarious situation. Francis was himself then almost powerless. Since the death of Colonel Monson, he and his friends had been left in an absolute minority in the Council ; he was himself accused of a factious opposition to the Governor-General ; and their long enmity was growing bitter and irreconcilable. But he nobly responded to the appeal of the Burkes, undertaking to do everything that he could for William, offering him, in the worst event, a shelter in his own house until the approach of better times, professing the greatest respect for Edmund, and already intimating the hope of a sure revenge on Hastings for all that he had endured. "If," said Francis, with all the vindictive energy of Junius, "every relation between guilt and punishment be not absolutely dissolved, a time, I think, will come when they who now triumph over me will tremble, if they do not repent. Appearances are yet in their favour, but I still hope that I shall rise with lustre out of this fire."* The intrepid Governor-General,

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 185.

confident in his resources, with his enemies under his feet, and wielding an apparently irresponsible power, would have scornfully laughed at these threats of his unrelenting antagonist. Yet, expressed as they were to William Burke, and transmitted by him to Edmund, who had for years looked with detestation on the conduct of Hastings, and had twice given utterance to this sentiment in the House of Commons, this letter of Francis is not without a deep significance. William Burke soon returned to England as agent for the Rajah of Tanjore, and again subsequently returned to India. The tales he had to tell his kinsmen about Indian mis-government were not forgotten by Edmund. The politic and haughty Governor-General, at that season of his supreme dictatorship over so many millions of Asiatics, saw not the gathering storm in the cloud no bigger than a man's hand. But he was making enemies of whose dauntless resolution he had no idea. It would have been well for him had he prepared himself for the conflict by calculating the range, and looking to the metal of his guns.

CHAPTER XXIV.

1777-1778.

FULFILLED PROPHECIES.

As his cousin was on his first voyage to Madras, Burke, unconscious of the mighty influence this Indian connection would have on himself, was endeavouring to please his constituents by writing his opinions on the Bills that had just been passed. The good citizens of Bristol expected their Member, at the close of each session, to send them the new Acts of Parliament, with elaborate comments from his own pen. He had also to attend to the private business of each of his supporters; and he found, to his surprise, that they looked more at his ability to confer small favours of this nature than to his most arduous endeavours in a great line of imperial policy. This was a very humiliating discovery. It shows how little real enlightenment there was, even in the best constituencies at the time of the American war; and accounts for that uniform support which one of the most incapable Ministries with which a great country has been ever cursed, received through years of disappointment, disgrace, and defeat, in opposition to the most prophetic wisdom and the purest patriotism that England has ever seen. To a member of Burke's comprehensive mind, the littleness of his constituents was very irksome. On being harassed by his friend Champion's importunities

on this subject, he intimated that Bristol might possibly at the next election have some more fortunate representative.*

While thus reminded of what the good citizens of Bristol expected from him, Burke had received, through old General Oglethorpe, as the founder of the province, a most flattering testimony of respect from the Colonists of Georgia, and from Dr. Robertson the present of his *History of America*, which had been published in the course of the season. He was prevented by a lame hand from answering the old General's kind testimonial immediately; and from reading consecutively the new history of America until he had finished some troublesome business at the end of the session. He at length assured the veteran warrior, who looked like a living skeleton, that the mark of honour he had conveyed to him was the most valuable testimonial to the uprightness of his conduct that had ever been given to him; and he gratified the learned historian with the most eloquent criticism of his work that any author could receive from an eminent statesman. The subdued fire of the man of letters, as distinguished from the politician, burst forth for a moment in full vigour, while Burke was reading this record the past history of America and sorrowing over the new materials for the historian which the civil war was then accumulating; and he professed to send in return to Dr. Robertson the Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol as a slight production, born with the day, and to perish with it, in exchange, as he humbly said, for an immortal work which would convey instruction to future generations.†

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 169.

† The letter to Dr. Robertson has been long published. It was first printed in the *Memoir* of the historian written by Dugald Stewart, and prefixed to Robertson's works.

The reverend historian was very proud of this letter. He took every opportunity of showing it to his friends, with the excuse of proving what an interest Mr. Burke took in literature, and how finely he could express himself in a mere epistolary criticism ; but the real secret of the Doctor's intense admiration of this epistle, and the reason why he so carefully preserved it and delighted to bring it forth, was the very flattering appreciation it expressed of his own merits as an historian. On the little vanities of authors, Burke generally looked with much indulgent complacency ; he was more inclined to minister to them than rebuke them ; and he never shocked the prejudices of men of letters by placing his own active or speculative labours in the same high rank with their purely literary performances.

Against this Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol, about which he wrote so slightly to Dr. Robertson, all the extreme thinkers in favour of freedom were up in arms. His assertion of a general supremacy in the British Legislature, his defence of the secession, and the oblique censure passed on those who had exerted themselves to modify the Habeas Corpus Act, had given much offence, and especially to an eccentric and enthusiastic nobleman, William Bertie, fourth Earl of Abingdon, who had vigorously opposed the partial suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, in the House of Lords, and been the only Peer who formally protested against the Bill. He had been one of Dr. Markham's pupils at Westminster, and had studied at Oxford ; but afterwards going to Geneva, he had become attached to extreme democratic, if not republican, principles, which, with the Calvinistic theology, had struck such deep roots in the rugged soil of the Swiss federation. Though not regarded as a

member of the Rockingham party, he was on terms of friendship with the Marquis, and professed to admire Burke's writings; but being warm, eager, and uncompromising he assumed a convenient and independent position on the Whig frontier. Before leaving town for the summer, he had met Burke at Lord Rockingham's, in Grosvenor Square, and had complained to him of the manner in which he considered his recent conduct had been indirectly blamed in the Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol. On going up to London one day in August, Burke, with some surprise, saw a letter to himself advertised as on the point of publication, by this nobleman, on the subject of the Bristol epistle. Anticipating the purport of Lord Abingdon's commentary, Burke was much annoyed that a respectable peer, of the same political side, should join his enemies, countenance the attacks that were daily made upon him, and gratify the courtiers by publicly exemplifying the perverse nature of the Opposition, whose fate it seemed, indeed, never to agree. He wrote to Lord Abingdon, hoping that he would not thus allow himself to play the game of their common enemies, and wishing him, if the treatise were such as he supposed, to suppress it rather than allow it to be considered another element of barren dissension. This, however, Lord Abingdon, in a very polite and respectful reply, positively refused to do. The pamphlet had been printed off, and it having been announced, he considered it a point of honour to give his production to the world.*

Shortly afterwards it appeared. Dr. Markham's sermon was warmly attacked in this production of his refractory pupil, who reminded the Archbishop of the

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 177.

lashes he had once received from him, and hoped that he was now out of the reach of the books as well as of the clutches of the schoolmaster. Professing to join in all Burke's denunciations of the civil war, the noble author however attacked most of his principles. He appeared to think he made amends for this onslaught on the great orator and writer of the Whig party, by declaring his unlimited attachment to Lord Rockingham personally, whom the Earl affirmed that he must abandon nature before he could desert.

This pamphlet delighted all Burke's extreme opponents. Unaccustomed to think deeply on political principles, and unable to comprehend the elevation from which he looked on events of his time, some of them considered that his sophistries had been completely exploded by Lord Abingdon. Mason wrote to Walpole that he could not have been more surprised had he seen this little David knocking down a blackbird with a sling.*

Burke did not consider himself refuted. He had some thoughts of answering Lord Abingdon's letter; and, in communicating this intention to Lord Rockingham, he expressed himself confident of being able to give such a reply to the main objection of this noble polemic politician as would satisfy every fair man of even the weakest capacity.†

But both his judgment and inclination coincided in inducing him to relinquish this intention. Busied with his harvest, and banishing from his mind all political

* Correspondence between Walpole and Mason, edition 1851, vol. i. p. 309.

† Letter to Lord Rockingham in the Earl of Albemarle's Memoirs, vol. ii. p. 315.

speculations, which were peculiarly painful from the conviction of the coming evils that he was powerless to prevent, he abstained even from looking into a newspaper, and gave himself up unrestrainedly to the simple joys of the country. The weather had been very wet, and it was late before the corn was safely stacked. Burke thought his crop of wheat rather light, and he had not been able, from the unfavourable season, to sow his turnip-seed; but his clover had been most abundant, and his beans and oats had been very plentiful. He set himself also to improve his breed of sheep, and in the practical pursuits of the agriculturist, he endeavoured to forget for a few weeks the harassing anxieties of the politician. As generally occurred in these brief intervals of rural peace, the current of his thoughts turned to his farming cousin, Garret Nagle, in Kerry, and in relating to him the summer's success in cultivation, Burke pathetically laments that, as time elapsed, the generation with which his early years had been associated was fast passing away. "It grieves me to think," he wrote to his relative, "that the old stock is wearing out. God send that their successors may be better! Assure yourselves that nothing can do you all so much good as keeping up your old union and intercourse, and considering yourselves as one family. This is the old burden of my song."*

He was roused from his musings on the past, and his calm relaxation among his woods and fields, by a letter from Charles Fox.

Fox had been spending a portion of the autumn with the Cavendishes at Chatsworth. On riding out one day

* Letter of September 3rd, 1777: New Monthly Magazine, vol. xiv. p. 532.

with the Hon. John Townshend, he and his companion took the sudden resolution of crossing over to Ireland, and suffered but few days to elapse before they carried their hasty project into effect. Fox wrote to Burke informing him of his intention, desiring him, if he had any advice to give him, to address it to the Duke of Leinster's in Dublin, and complaining very intelligibly of the Cavendishes and the rest of their political friends, as persons, however amiable and pleasant, unfitted, from indolence and worldly circumstances, for storming the citadel of Government.*

Burke sent a brief answer to Fox's letter by the ordinary post. It had, however, stirred the momentarily placid waters, which on being once more in motion could not easily again sink into tranquillity. By a safe conveyance he sent Fox another long reply, in which he communicated confidentially his opinions both on English and Irish affairs, and entered with all the kindness and disinterestedness of a father into the consideration of Fox's own political prospects. Nothing can be more affectionate than the tone of this composition; nothing more judicious than the advice Burke gave his younger friend. Commencing with "My dear Charles," it is such an epistle as even the departed Lord Holland, who had loved his promising son not wisely but fondly, could not have more affectionately written. On the expression of discontent Fox had thrown out against the Cavendishes and their Rockingham allies, Burke made a few remarks, showing that whatever their faults were, they were the shortcomings of scrupulous and honourable men, who, feeling themselves unable at the time to save their country, had at least the consolation of quiet con-

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 182.

sciences and happy homes. He reminded Fox that he had never given him any advice to join the party ; but, as he really wished to see him great and powerful in the State, providing—and the indispensable qualification is very plainly stated—that he would always be disposed to make a good use of his power, and as, with all his abilities, he did not seem one likely to be a favourite in Courts, and would therefore need the solid support of public confidence, he wished the party and him to remain open to each other. Burke already appears desirous of smoothing the obstacles to Fox's leadership, and puts his own personal interests and his earlier claim to the office entirely out of view. His own troubles at Bristol are amusingly stated. The Corporation had thanked Lord Sandwich and Lord Stormont for their zeal in prosecuting John the Painter, and had requested permission, while American privateers were swarming on the coast, to arm vessels in defence of their own traders, in direct acknowledgment that the Government was unable to afford them that protection, and that the ties of the Commonwealth were broken. Concluding with the public object of his letter, Burke related his own experiences of Irish politics, and wished Fox to exert himself among his influential friends, to prevent the Parliament of that country addressing the Throne in support of the Ministerial policy of blood and ruin.

Fox, however, had then few thoughts of public business. He went to Ireland to amuse himself, and he so far succeeded. He astonished and pleased the light-hearted race by bathing in the Devil's Punch Bowl, of which the water is proverbially cold ; and he escaped with his vigorous constitution any evil results from this hazardous immersion. By the Lakes of Killarney he

met Burke's cousin, Garret Nagle, who appears to have been extremely pleased with Fox's notice. Burke, in his reply to the account Garret had given him of the reception he had met with from the fashionable tourists, shows how sincere was his admiration of Fox, and how earnest he was in impressing others with similar enthusiasm. This letter, intended for his humble cousin's private eye, exhibits his genuine sentiments, in which not the slightest trace of jealousy can be seen. "Don't you like Charles Fox? If you were not pleased on that short acquaintance, you would on a further; for he is one of the pleasantest men in the world, as well as the greatest genius that perhaps this country has ever produced. If he is not extraordinary, I assure you the British dominions cannot furnish anything beyond him. I long to talk with him about you and your Lough."*

In the same letter Burke gave his cousin a general account of family affairs. Young Edmund Nagle had shown great aptitude for his profession as a sailor; he had been this summer visiting Garret in Ireland; and had just been made a lieutenant at the earliest possible moment that, according to the naval regulations, he could attain this advancement. Burke congratulated his kinsman on his promotion, and hoped that his friends would live to see young Ned an admiral. He did ultimately become one; and if not ranked in public estimation among the Blakes, Vincents, and Nelsons, at whose names every patriotic Englishman's heart throbs proudly, yet a more honest, sturdy, and gallant officer than was Admiral Sir Edmund Nagle, seldom hoisted his flag. Another of Burke's relatives, Walter Nagle, whom he

* Letter of October 26th, 1777: New Monthly Magazine, vol. xiv. p. 533.

had formerly sent to India, and in whom, though only a humble handcraftsman, he felt much interest, had, while in London this autumn, found himself in a very disagreeable scrape. He had been taken into custody. Richard Burke, being fortunately in town at the time, procured bail for him, and Edmund himself went up to London to afford him his influential support. The journey was unnecessary. The grand jury threw out the bill, and Walter Nagle was released. The poor man died shortly afterwards of a putrid fever. As he left two children at school in Staffordshire, without any means of subsistence, they became another of the many burdens on Burke's limited income.

The rents of Clohir were paid slowly and irregularly. The tenants were poor. A receipt from Burke for fifty-one pounds, on account of the farm, has been published ; and this appears to have been the full amount of a half-year's rent-roll, with the many deductions which kindness to his Irish relatives always occasioned.*

Before the close of this year he received a letter informing him that his title to the small estate from which he personally received so little benefit, was still disputed, and that he might prepare himself for a lawsuit. Powerful friends, evidently his political enemies, had, as he was informed, taken up the cause of the original owners of Clohir, and, considering him to be guilty of much cruelty and injustice, were going to supply money to them for the purpose of carrying on legal proceedings. It was in reply to this not very friendly intimation, which also enclosed another still less amicable from a Mr. John Henessy, that Burke wrote the epistle previously alluded to,† in which he gave a detailed ac-

* New Monthly Magazine, vol. xiv. p. 533.

† Vol. I. p. 258.

count of the manner in which he acquired Clohir ; what his conduct had been to the family from whom it had been derived ; and how, so far as he knew, his deceased brother had acted at the time, and after he had obtained this small property. Anything that he could do, without affecting a right which a decree of a Court of Equity had justified, or without casting an unmerited stain on his brother's memory, he was willing to do, to relieve the sufferings of the late possessors. He had already done much ; he was willing to do more. But, for the sake of all parties, and especially of the tenants even of the old family themselves, who depended for their very existence on his right being maintained, he refused to make any compromise with this Mr. Robert Nagle, who, as a religious renegade, had sought to deprive his mother, his brother, and a large family of children, of the bread which was secured to them according to the terms of Garret Burke's acquisition. He also observed, that if those very powerful persons with whose hostility he was threatened were as ready as himself to relieve the distresses of these poor people, and would for that object give them the money they promised to expend in a lawsuit against him, he believed they would put them more easily and speedily at their ease, and show themselves much more truly their friends. With regard to the imputation of his wishing to controvert the just claims of any one, he spoke with quiet scorn, and made one very intelligible and unanswerable remark : "I think I should not have done so for interests of the greatest magnitude in the world, much less for one which, though in my circumstances not to be neglected by me, is as nothing in comparison with those which I slight every day of my life in favour of what I think fair and honest. Indeed, it

is little worthy of any injustice either to obtain or hold.”*

This was indeed literally true. Through years of hopeless opposition, in straitened pecuniary circumstances, he had remained steadily opposed to the Court and to those by whom all substantial emoluments were bestowed. Many years of almost hopeless opposition were, in his opinion, yet before his friends; and yet, of the whole party, he was the man whose voice was most loudly raised to encourage them in the path which was at that time neither cheered by royal favour nor popular applause. The passions of the King, Ministers, and the people, were sanguinely placed upon the issue of the war; and they fully expected that the campaign then in progress, and for which great preparations had been made, would silence all the cavils of their political opponents. The meeting of Parliament for the session was postponed until late in November, in the confident expectation that before the appointed time the news of a great and decisive success would have arrived, and glorious materials be supplied for the Speech from the Throne.

The plan of the campaign consisted of two parts. General Burgoyne, with seven thousand excellent troops, and provided with a fine train of brass artillery, was to force his way from Canada, by the side of the Lakes, and advancing on the back of the more northern provinces, endeavour to reach Albany, and open communications with troops advancing from the south. General Howe was at the same time to operate independently against Philadelphia, which it was hoped would soon be in his possession; but the immediate design, so far as it

* Letter of December 9th, 1777, in New Monthly Magazine, vol. xvi. p. 153.

can be understood, was to cut off New England and New York from the southern Colonies.

The invasion from Canada was especially the favourite of the Ministers. The evil effects of dividing armies, and sending troops without certain communications to struggle through rugged and hostile countries, were but little regarded. General Burgoyne had also taken several of the Indian nations into his service, and the British bayonet was associated in a common warfare with the tomahawk and the scalping-knife. Gratifying his savage allies at a war-feast, he delivered them a speech of high-flown eloquence, worthy indeed of the dramatic and oratorical reputation of the author, and in which he tried to impress upon the untutored barbarians the humane sentiments of civilized soldiers. But the strange combination of bombast, humanity, and patriotism, appeared ludicrously incongruous. He also published a severe proclamation against the Colonists, whom it seemed his design to frighten with the vengeance of his Indian allies; and rapidly proceeding to invest Ticonderoga, the Americans were alarmed, and the English at home proudly exultant, on learning that, through the most disgraceful negligence, this strong post was abandoned without any serious resistance. Burgoyne's difficulties were however but beginning, when the people of England, so little accustomed to defeat, were reviving all the old taunts of cowardice against the Americans, and anticipating their final submission. Yet, by the middle of November, some evil surmises with regard to his expedition were getting abroad. General Howe, after much manœuvring, had found it impossible to draw Washington from his strong camp in the mountains. Embarking with his troops, he changed the seat of war from the

Jerseys to the River Elk, at the extremity of Chesapeake Bay. Washington however prepared to dispute his advance; and with the next despatches that should arrive in England after the assembling of Parliament on the twentieth of November, the news of a great victory, and the consequent advance to Philadelphia, were considered certain.

To Burke, who had chronicled the glorious period of the last war, the prospect of affairs appeared indeed so gloomy, that no battles gained over the Americans could enliven the scene. Our coasts at the mercy of privateers; our linen ships from Dublin and Newry requiring a convoy, even for merely crossing the Channel; fleets of foreign vessels in the Thames employed by English merchants to convey their goods to the Continent with that safety which the British flag could no longer secure; the French Ministers scarcely taking the trouble to deny ironically the open assistance they gave to the Americans; and the British Government compelled to accept professions of friendship which were glaringly false: this was the contrast that England afforded to him as he recalled the time when there was a victory in nearly every Gazette, the whole power of the House of Bourbon defied, and the high seas as secure to English merchantmen as their own ports.*

An Amendment to the Address, proposing the suspension of hostilities, for the purpose of entering into pacific negotiations, was moved in the House of Lords by Lord Chatham in concert with Lord Rockingham. A similar motion, at the suggestion of the Marquis, was entrusted to Lord Granby in the Commons, and seconded by Lord John Cavendish. The feeling of the

* See *Annual Register*, 1778, pp. 35-38.

Opposition in both Houses was intense, and their language warm and severe. Chatham, in replying to Lord Suffolk, who had apologized for the employment of the Indians, on the ground that it was justifiable in the Ministry to use all the means of warfare that God and Nature had put into their hands, spoke with all his old brilliancy, and delivered a glowing, lofty, and indignant oration, which, of its kind, is unrivalled in English oratory. Burke also spoke for two hours after Lord North; and alternately, as a contemporary report describes, had the whole House in laughter or in tears.*

After Burke's speech, Fox fiercely attacked Lord George Germaine, the American Secretary of State, and the planner of this invasion from Canada. The temper of the House was changing. The country gentlemen, who had hitherto cheered on the Ministers in all their sanguinary policy, in the absurd expectation of obtaining a revenue from America, on seeing the great expenses of campaigns which seemed to render hostilities only more inveterate, no longer rose eagerly to speak in defence of the Government, but, pulling their hats over their eyes, preserved an ominous silence.† Though the Amendment was rejected by the usual majority, the Administration was as evidently losing ground.

The debate was even renewed the next day, when the report was brought up. Charles Turner spoke honestly and strongly against the war, and with his genuine simplicity regretted that he had not at command a Latin quotation to express more clearly his sentiments.‡ Fox again assailed Lord Germaine, as it was convenient for him to do; for he could scarcely blame

* Parl. Hist., vol. xix. p. 431. † Annual Register, 1778, p. 41.

‡ Parl. Hist., vol. xix. p. 442.

his intimate friend and companion on the turf and at the gaming-table, General Burgoyne. Wedderburne replied to Fox, and Burke replied to Wedderburne, who had deprecated Fox's strong personalities. Burke reminded the Solicitor-General, who was so conversant in the art of meek evasion and gentle simulation, of the time when he delivered quite as strong invectives against Lord Hillsborough as Fox, with much more reason, fulminated against Lord George Germaine.

Both in the field and in the Cabinet, Lord George appeared equally unfortunate. He had been one of the most unpopular public men in the empire. He had acquired official experience as Chief Secretary to his father, the Duke of Dorset, when this nobleman was Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland. He had been struck by a musket-ball at Fontenoy, and had served with distinction under the Duke of Cumberland during the rebellion in Scotland. Yet Lord George had long laboured under the imputation most injurious to the character of a soldier and the descendant of a family renowned for wit, generosity, and valour. On the great day of Minden his slowness in advancing at the head of the cavalry, alone saved the defeated enemy from a total rout. Dismissed from the army by the sentence of a court-martial, he had since been restored, in the early days of George III., when it seemed to be the principal pleasure of his Majesty and his advisers to favour the persons who had been most in disgrace during the former reign. Chatham had however regarded any favour to Lord George Germaine as an insult to himself; and this enmity had for a time thrown the unfortunate soldier into the ranks of the Rockingham party, which it seemed to have been his object at one time to lead in the House of Commons.

The East Indian business had brought him over to the Court ; the opinions to which he had given utterance on American affairs had much pleased Lord North ; and on finding that Lord George was prepared to act upon them in office, the Prime Minister had made him Secretary of State, with the direction of the war. An officer who had formerly been dismissed from his Majesty's service for cowardice, and whose courage was still in popular estimation most questionable, was not perhaps the most eligible War Minister. But Lord North, with his habitual facility, appeared glad to get any one on the Treasury bench to share in a high office the responsibility of the Ministerial policy. Besides, the new Secretary of State spoke with much vehement volubility ; his eyes were keen and piercing ; he could read the temper of the House at a single glance ; and this faculty in a colleague was of much use to a Prime Minister who could not see clearly, even across the table. Though there was little either amiable or prepossessing in the American Secretary's appearance ; yet, tall, grave, solemn, and morose as he was, he looked like a man of high lineage and of solid sense. The cares of state sat as easily upon him as on Lord North. Never perhaps were there two colleagues in office during a great national emergency so admirably qualified, by circumstances and disposition, to ruin a great empire with the utmost official serenity of mind. As Lord George every night sat down cheerfully to an excellent supper after the debate in the House of Commons, and complacently sipped his usual pint of claret, his friends could not but admire his careless and happy bearing, while despatch after despatch was bringing news of enemies multiplying, of armies capitulating,* and of

* See Wraxall's Hist. Mem., vol. ii. p. 162.

territories being lost for ever to the British Crown. But while thus as easy as Lord North on the results of their measures, he was not, like the Head of the Government, almost invulnerable in his temper to the attacks of the Opposition. Burke and Fox found that, though it was very difficult to pierce through the pliant panoply of the Prime Minister, who laughed with his opponents at their sarcastic wit, and slept peacefully amid the reverberations of their invectives, yet that it was easy to put Lord George Germaine into a passion ; and that when once roused to anger, he was sure to let out the most important secrets of the Cabinet.

The Opposition, with the two friends at its head, had, at the anticipated approach of disaster, been roused to act with energy. Every estimate, every proposition of the Ministry, was stoutly contested, and though the number of the majority showed as yet but little diminution, it was clear that the morbid apathy of the public, which had insensibly influenced even the Rockingham party, was passing away. The proposition to continue the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, was strenuously resisted by Burke. William Baker, Member for Hull, and one of Burke's most enthusiastic admirers, moved for a correct return of the persons who had been imprisoned under the operation of the Bill. The Ministers admitted that few individuals had been taken up ; but then, argued Welbore Ellis, this proved how beneficial the suspension had been, for it had efficaciously overawed the disaffected, and prevented rebellion. Burke attacked this declaration of the official drudge with much indignation. If, said he, the liberty of the subject ought to be suspended, and terror administered, like Prior's physic, " by way of prevention," the same argument would hold good to all eternity.

Ellis replied pertly, that the honourable Member was not justified in flying to such extremes, for that no political nor metaphysical proposition could be advanced that might not, when pushed to the utmost limits, appear to terminate in an absurdity. Burke again rose, and seemed then, as on other occasions, to take a pleasure in rebuking the pedantic officiousness of the minor Ministerialists in general, and Welbore Ellis in particular. He admitted that the truth was not to be found in metaphysical extremes. All political measures were however to be judged by their consequences. The land-tax had at first been introduced as a temporary means of supply, but it had become a standing portion of the revenue; the army was at first voted for a year, but it had become a standing army; and this temporary suspension of one of the wisest and best of English laws, might become standing suspension, and end in its complete destruction.*

The Government exhibited no vigour. It was evident that the vessel of the State was labouring in a most dangerous course, without either a disciplined crew or a vigorous hand at the helm. One official contradicted another. Mr. Bull, a Commissioner of the Navy, moved the number of men for this service, and was entering into a detailed account of the Royal ships in commission, when he was sternly interrupted by the Attorney-General Thurlow, who reprimanded him for his indiscretion in giving the House information which might be made available by the enemy. On the vote for the land-tax there were similar dissensions, which induced Fox to give notice of an immediate motion for an inquiry into the state of the nation.

He brought it forward on the second of December.

* Parl. Hist., vol. xix. pp. 465, 466. Annual Register, 1778. p. 58.

Though such a motion is generally considered a direct vote of censure against the existing Ministry, it was however agreed to by Lord North, and the second of February was the day appointed for going into Committee of the whole House. It was known that the British troops had been victorious in a general engagement on the Brandywine, and that they had acquired possession of Philadelphia ; but news had also just arrived of a bold attack by Washington on the British camp at Germantown, which, though ultimately repulsed, had been nearly successful ; and which showed to all Europe that his army was acquiring the organization and confidence, not only to fight under cover, but to cross bayonets with the best soldiers under the Royal banner. The tone of Lord North was therefore apologetic and submissive. Fox moved for papers after papers, which were all readily granted, except those which related to the proceedings of the Commissioners under the Prohibitory Act for granting pardons either to separate individuals, towns, or colonies. The Minister objected decidedly to this motion. An interesting debate ensued. In answering the objections of the Government to treating with the United States while they adhered to their Declaration of Independence, Burke's speech indicated that his mind had moved forward with the progress of the civil war, and that he was preparing to recommend the recognition of American independence. Were not the Colonies, he demanded, independent in fact ? How could they be expected formally to renounce that of which they were clearly in possession, and really subject themselves to punishment by acknowledging themselves both rebels and criminals ?* He made an able

* Parl. Hist., vol. xix. p. 516.

and pointed speech in support of Fox, and was forcibly followed on the same side by Dunning.

Thurlow began to reply. He was declaiming in his sonorous manner on the impolicy of producing the papers at such a critical time, when a Member entered the House and stated that the same papers had just been unhesitatingly granted by the other Ministers in the House of Lords. The Opposition burst out into a loud laugh ; a whisper of the circumstance reached the Treasury bench ; and even the stolid Attorney-General was for the moment thrown into confusion. Summoning up his courage, before sitting down, he declared, that, whatever other Ministers might do, he, as a Member of Parliament, would never give his consent for producing the documents relating to unfinished negotiations. Neither his menacing scowl, nor the rolling thunder of his voice, could extinguish the laughter of the Opposition. Lord North was equally unable to bring the House into a serious mood, or to put a specious appearance on the total want of concert in the Government demonstrated by such an incident. This was one of the very few occasions on which even his friends admitted that he quite lost his temper, and spoke in a passion. He resolutely refused to agree to the motion. On dividing the House, he found himself supported by his obedient majority, who gravely denied to their fellow-representatives the papers which were accessible to the Lords.*

The next day came tidings which put the attachment of the Prime Minister's most devoted followers to the proof. The fate of General Burgoyne's expedition was at last known. For weeks indeed disagreeable surmises had been abroad. Chatham had publicly declared his

* *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xix. pp. 517-532.

belief that some great disaster was imminent ; and his sagacious forebodings were more than realized. The employment of the Indians, which had brought so much obloquy on the Royal arms, was the principal cause of Burgoyne's ruin. The terror they occasioned had induced every Colonist on the route of the army to hasten forth in defence of his home, and bodies of provincial militia assembled on the flanks and front of the devoted army. After repelling repeated attacks with great gallantry, after enduring severe privations, and finding his strong position on the heights above Fish Kill almost encircled by the Americans, and his camp commanded by their artillery, Burgoyne, on the seventeenth of October, had signed the Convention of Saratoga, by which himself and his troops surrendered themselves prisoners of war to the rude Colonial patriots whose military qualifications they but lately thought so despicable.

On the evening of the day when information of this disaster reached Westminster, the House of Commons went into Committee on the Army Estimates. Colonel Barré immediately asked Lord George Germaine whether the news of Burgoyne's surrender had been received by the Government. The Secretary of State acknowledged that intelligence of this most unfortunate event had actually come from Quebec ; but he also hoped that the House would suspend its judgment, both on the Minister who had planned the expedition and the General who had attempted to carry it into effect. He spoke in a calm and apathetic manner, as though he were answering the most ordinary question of administrative routine. The Minister had scarcely resumed his seat, when a storm of the most indignant invective burst against him from the Opposition. Burke thanked the preceding speakers for

having given him time to allow the emotion with which he had heard Lord Germaine's announcement, to subside; and he then assailed him strongly as the cause of the great and almost unexampled calamity which had befallen the British arms. What could be more preposterous, he said, if a junction between Howe and Burgoyne had really been intended, for one General to move southward on Philadelphia, while the other was expected to advance from the north to Albany? Was it at all to be wondered at that one of them should have been cut off? No blame could be imputed to Burgoyne. He had but obeyed the orders of the American Minister, who might find the services of his counsel, the Solicitor-General, fully required, to protect him from the retribution of the House of Commons.*

Wedderburne immediately followed in the debate. Entering into a description of his own political character, this mercenary advocate, whose insincerity had become proverbial, declared with great gravity that he always spoke his genuine sentiments, and would disdain in Parliament to allow himself to become any man's advocate. He whose sudden acceptance of the office of Solicitor-General, in the very heat of opposition, was considered the most shameless instance of political prostitution even in that shameless age, declared, with consummate assurance, that his opinions had always been most consistent and invariable. Burke met this ludicrous announcement with a loud laugh, which he found it impossible to suppress. The House was however unusually silent, from the serious nature of the intelligence which the Minister had allowed to be true; and Wedderburne, stung by Burke's significant demonstration of merriment, warmly retorted, that if

* Parl. Hist., vol. xix, p. 539.

that gentleman did not know manners, he, as an individual, would teach him them ; and that, though he knew he neither had that gentleman's goodwill, nor wished for it, yet he was still ambitious even of his respect, which he would compel him to grant.

Burke immediately left the House. Supposing that he had gone to send him a challenge, the blustering advocate found all his valour forsake him, wrote a humble letter in explanation, and also sent a verbal apology by Fox, who continued the discussion, declaring, with the utmost vehemence, that Lord George Germaine should be brought to another trial, and concluding with a warm panegyric on Burke as his honourable friend.*

As soon as the resolutions on the Army Estimates were passed, Fox made a motion for Burgoyne's instructions. The Administration carried the previous question ; but their moral power, as a Government entrusted with the direction of a great war, was completely overthrown by the capitulation of Saratoga. Even the most devoted of courtiers showed symptoms of alarm. Lord North himself began to think either of resigning, or of attempting earnestly the conciliation of America ; and, anxious to gain some time for reflection, resolved to adjourn the House, which had been sitting little more than a fortnight. On the tenth of December this motion for immediate adjournment until after Christmas was made. Burke, who, as he saw his prophecies of disaster so speedily fulfilled, had become most animated and vehement in his language, denouncing the inordinate expenses of the Ordnance Estimates as greater for an army of eighty-

* Letter of Mr. Crawford to Lord Ossory, in *Memoirs and Correspondence of Fox*, vol. i. p. 161. *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xix. p. 540.

nine thousand men than they had been in the glorious year 1759, for forces which then amounted to two hundred and fifty thousand; and condemning strongly the wanton destruction of the town of Esopus by General Vaughan, moved an amendment that the House should only adjourn for a week. Lord North, he observed, seemed, at all events, anxious to keep his place. But how could the author of their grievances hope to be accepted by the Americans as their trusted friend? How could a satisfactory treaty of peace be determined by the originator of the war? A treaty of alliance between France and America was being negotiated; a treaty of alliance was perhaps on the point of being concluded; and when they had just heard of the loss of one army, and that another was closely pressed within its quarters at Philadelphia, was this a time for Parliament to neglect its duties, and, at the request of the Government, to adjourn contentedly for a long interval? Events fully justified these forebodings. It was during this recess, in December, that a treaty of commerce was settled between France and the United States, and it was followed in the next February by a treaty of alliance.

But Lord North replied that during the proposed Committee on the State of the Nation, in which the House had agreed to go on the second of February, the proper opportunity would occur for considering what concessions should be made; and he endeavoured to give an elaborate answer to Burke's powerful objections, affirming, as a Minister, that he did not believe either France or Spain to have the least intention to interfere. Fox attacked every portion of Lord North's speech. Following up Burke's representations, he said that the House of Bourbon had long only waited for a favourable

opportunity to join the Americans ; that this opportunity had at last arrived ; and that a war with these Powers was inevitable. Burke and he were the tellers against the motion of adjournment ; they were, however, only supported by sixty-eight Members ; and at, perhaps, the most critical period in all the History of England the House of Commons deliberately abrogated its functions for six weeks.* On the following day a similar motion of adjournment was proposed in the House of Lords ; and, notwithstanding the earnest remonstrances of Chatham, accepted by as decisive a majority.

The Christmas recess was a period of much anxiety. The serious nature of the war in which the Court had so thoughtlessly embarked, and the other great wars which were impending, seemed at last palpable to the most sanguine supporters of the Administration. Every day there was a new rumour, about treaties having been signed or being about to be signed between France and America, of complete submission to the independence of the Colonies on the part of the Government, or of embodying new regiments and carrying on the war with more than the usual determination. Men knew not what to believe. Care sat on the brows of all. The Stocks fell very low. Subscriptions for the better maintenance of the American prisoners were first countenanced by the Earl of Abingdon, and eagerly adopted by the rest of the Opposition, as a means, under a charitable guise, of affording a public testimony of their political sympathies. The Government, on the other hand, having for the moment rid themselves of Parliamentary control, encouraged private subscriptions for levying and supporting troops for the American war ; and every effort was par-

* Parl. Hist., vol. xix. pp. 589-592.

ticularly made to induce the corporations of the great commercial towns of London and Bristol, by voluntary contributions, to provide soldiers for the Government. Both these attempts were unsuccessful. But the defeated party succeeded in raising as individuals some twenty thousand pounds in the City. Funds were also subscribed throughout the country ; Liverpool and Manchester were prominent in the cause ; and in Scotland, then passionately loyal, this testimony of devotion to the Court was enthusiastically given. Edinburgh and Glasgow each supplied a thousand men. Regiments of Highlanders were enrolled under the Royal standard. The rank soil of old Jacobitism was everywhere the hot-bed of the new Toryism. Ministers exulted at the popular attachment which the new levies indicated ; and the necessity of receiving the sanction of the Legislature before accepting these military aids, was altogether disregarded.*

As soon, however, as Parliament re-assembled in January, it showed that it was not unanimously prepared to be treated as a nullity. In both Houses these new levies, which, amounting to not less than fifteen thousand men, had, without consent of the Legislature, been raised during the recess, were warmly condemned as most unconstitutional. Lord North informed the House of Commons, that the purposes for which the long adjournment was proposed had been perfectly answered, and that the voluntary efforts of his Majesty's loyal servants had been especially gratifying to the Administration. Burke replied, that the noble Lord's warmth might be most praiseworthy ; he was, it appeared, a Minister acting unconstitutionally for the good of his country. Then entering

* Annual Register, 1778, chap. v.

on the general condition of affairs, he showed from the lowness of the funds, as contrasted with their buoyancy during the former war, how much the national credit had sunk, and how serious was the crisis in which they stood. He disapproved of the voluntary subscriptions, both as a means of economy and of efficiency ; compared Lord North, when boasting of such indications of public spirit, to Pericles walking out adorned with all kinds of charms and amulets that old women recommended as potent to remedy an agonizing disease ; and told him, that though it pleased him to ring the changes upon the words Constitution and Constitutional, he might as well expect that his garter would save him from the gout, and his ribbon drive out a fever, as his frequent prostitution of such terms would secure his ministerial conduct from future investigation.* From the threats Burke threw out at this time, and subsequently, he evidently contemplated an impeachment of the Ministry. He even went so far at last, as the calamities of the nation deepened, to draw up formal charges against Lord North, carried them about in his pocket, and provided himself with a formidable collection of papers. These materials were afterwards submitted to Lord Rockingham ; but the cautious Marquis, disapproving, as has been alleged, of such a determined proceeding, afterwards carefully kept them under his own lock and key.†

The discussions of that day in themselves illustrated the fleeting nature of the attachments and the enmities of most politicians. After some motions which in other circumstances would have been indignantly rejected, were carried, with the acquiescence of the Ministry, Fox

* Parl. Hist., vol. xix. 617.

† Wraxall's Historical Memoirs, vol. iii. p. 329, etc.

moved for copies of the instructions and other papers relating to Burgoyne's expedition. Alluding to the remarkable circumstance that the American war found most favour in places which had ever since the Revolution been understood to be disaffected to the House of Hanover, he not obscurely intimated, that they were eager to marshal George III. on the way in which their darling sovereign, James II., had lost his crown. On being called to order, he dexterously qualified his words. But he had no sooner sat down than he was bitterly attacked by that very Colonel Luttrell whom, after the Middlesex elections, he had solemnly pledged himself to adore to the last moment of his life; and who now turned round upon him, and did not disdain to remind him of a private conversation in which, with youthful ardour, Fox had declared that he would speak treason in any place and at any time he chose. Lord North said, that if Fox had not spoken treason on this occasion, he had at least gone very near the brink of disloyalty. Fox denied the imputation, but, as Lord George Germaine was absent on account of a domestic sorrow, agreed to postpone his motion for a few days. When it was again renewed, on the twenty-seventh of January, the Colonel again expressed his horror of principles that tended directly to rebellion; and taunting Fox as an orator who spent his time in studying inflammatory harangues, and Burke as a rhetorician who earned his livelihood by publishing his speeches, he accused them and all who followed them with being abettors of treason and rebellion designedly combined to ruin their country. He was loudly called to order. Charles Turner had taken down Luttrell's offensive expressions, and, reading them over, and speaking with scorn of the insults that had been levelled

against his friends, he said, that the fault was quite in another direction. “On my conscience,” he affirmed, “I am convinced that these Ministers are the persons really combined to betray their country.”

An account of this scene, not altogether to the advantage of Colonel Luttrell, appearing in one of the morning papers, he complained immediately to the House of this representation, and to revenge himself, as he said, on the editor of the journal, moved that the standing orders should be rigidly enforced, and all strangers excluded from the gallery. This was one of the last outbreaks of the old Venetian spirit over which Burke and Turner had won such a glorious victory, and which was at length all but extinguished. The former ardour against the people no longer existed, or existed almost in the person of Rigby alone, who hoped that, as the great Committee of Inquiry on the State of the Nation would commence in the course of the following week, that the gallery would be closed both to ladies and gentlemen.

Charles Turner again, as became him, gallantly came forward. “I do not like,” he said, “a man who weighs his words and is afraid of having his speeches published. When circumstances require it, I wish to see people warm as their fathers formerly were, and as I hope their children will afterwards be. I should be happy to see the gallery always crowded; and if one door be shut to exclude the men, I hope another will be opened to let in all the women.” The Speaker, remembering his former sufferings through two long nights, was far from eager to carry into effect the standing orders. He confessed that he had, with the acquiescence of the House, relaxed the one for excluding strangers, and he now

wished to be directed as to what he should do. Burke highly complimented the Speaker for his moderation. He argued, that some laws were better kept in the breach than in the observance ; that both as a channel for the information of constituents and as a school for the instruction of youth, he had not the slightest doubt about the propriety of opening the doors to strangers ; and that even for the amusement and information of the ladies, it was a matter of very serious concern, and ought not to be lightly treated. He was again on the subject powerfully persuasive and convincing. Colonel Luttrell saw that it was necessary to beat a retreat ; and candidly acknowledging that he had been staggered by what Burke had said, begged to withdraw his motion.*

On the second of February, when the great Committee of the whole House was to commence its sittings, immense crowds assembled round Westminster. Everybody was so anxious to hear Charles Fox, that in spite of the door-keepers they pushed open the doors of the gallery and succeeded in forcibly obtaining admission. Members were, however, indignant at this unauthorized invasion. A motion was made for the removal of strangers. But the officials, knowing how temperate had recently been the Speaker's conduct in respect to the enforcement of the standing order, were in a very indulgent mood, and they permitted many women, then not carefully kept out of sight by brass railings, to remain in the gallery. Governor Johnstone had that day brought some friends down to the House. He was much annoyed to see them, as strangers of the masculine gender, compelled to go away, while those of the gentler sex were gallantly permitted to abide. He boisterously

* Parl. Hist., vol. xix. pp. 647-650.

shouted out that all strangers should leave the House. A scene of great agitation followed. Amid the unusual flutter of lace, silk, and spangles, demonstrations of resistance were not imperceptible. But at last the ladies, amounting to more than sixty in number, and including Lady Norton, the wife of the Speaker, and the young and beautiful Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, were obliged to retire.*

Though Fox's audience was diminished, his speech was worthy of any assembly and of any occasion. His object was to bring at once the American war to a close, by showing, even from the papers recently furnished by Ministers themselves, that there was no probability of success, and that the longer it continued, the more dangerous the position of England became. Speaking for more than two hours, he embraced the whole field of policy, traced the leading causes and successive epochs of the war, showed the danger of weakening the regular forces in Great Britain, Ireland, Minorca, and Gibraltar at a time when hostilities with foreign Powers were evidently impending, and concluded with moving that no more of the old regiments should be sent out of the kingdom. As he sat down, everybody was in the highest pitch of expectation. Unable however to meet in any respect the powerful argumentative oration that had been delivered, substantiated as it was by undeniable and most alarming facts obvious to the humblest understanding, the Administration adopted the extraordinary tactics of making no reply, and, relying on their majority, of summarily bringing the debate to a close. Burke, in conversation with Reynolds, had lately maintained that a go-

* See the *Public Advertiser* of February 3, 1778; and *Hatsell's Precedents*, vol. ii. p. 172.

vernment, however strong, which should simply rely upon the number of its supporters, and refuse to answer the speeches of its opponents, would at last be beaten.* The division of this evening, in confirmation of this remark, showed a diminution of confidence among Lord North's supporters, and the increasing strength of the Opposition. The Ministerial numbers were two hundred and fifty-nine ; the Opposition counted one hundred and sixty-five.†

Another striking proof of the growing strength of the Opposition in Parliament was seen four days afterwards, in the next great debate. Burke made a motion for papers respecting the employment of the Indians in the war, and supported it by a magnificent oration of a three hours and a half's duration. The gallery was closed. No trustworthy report of this speech has been preserved. But the enthusiastic testimony of all who heard it stamped it as the finest he had yet made ; and Sir George Savile, a most competent judge, declared it indeed to have been the noblest triumph of eloquence within human memory. The subject was admirably suited to his ardent sensibility, brilliant imagination, pathetic power of moral painting, and all the noblest characteristics of his glowing oratory. In the more ludicrous portions of Burgoyne's Proclamation to the Indians, Lord North was himself almost bursting with laughter, and in the more pathetic portions of the speech, tears like those which rolled down the iron cheeks of Pluto were seen to suffuse the features of Barré, a grim and one-eyed Belisarius, who, in his military career, having himself experienced the horrors of Indian war, thus testified to the truth of Burke's inimitable description ; and he enthusiastically

* Boswell.

† Parl. Hist., vol. xix. p. 683.

offered, if he would publish the speech, to go himself and nail it up on every church-door in the kingdom by the side of the Royal Proclamation appointing a general fast on the twenty-seventh of the month. Rough sailors as well as stern soldiers were equally under the marvellous spell of the great orator, who has been so absurdly represented as little effective in the House of Commons. Governor Johnstone congratulated the Ministers on not having admitted strangers that day into the gallery; for, he said, their feelings would have been worked up to such a pitch of indignation that they might have torn the Ministers to pieces. All that has ever been related of the immediate effect of Sheridan's great speech on the Begum Charge, is surpassed by what Burke is proved to have produced on the feelings of his audience, in delivering this oration against the employment of the Indian savages in the civil war with our American kindred.

Nor was it merely oratory. His leading argument triumphantly met the usual rejoinder, that the Americans were ready to do what the English Generals had done. He showed that had the Americans really used these Indians as allies, they could only have set them loose against the King's disciplined soldiers, who were quite capable of defending themselves; while to employ them against the Colonists, was abandoning the quiet households of the husbandmen, with their unprotected women and helpless children, to the mercies of the war-whoop and the scalping-knife, wherever these barbarians of the woods pursued their desolating career.*

* Parliamentary History, vol. xix. pp. 694-708. Annual Register, 1778, pp. 110-116. Even Horace Walpole for a moment became enthusiastic as he gave his friend Mason an account at second-hand of Burke's great speech:—"Apropos, Burke's last Friday's parody of Burgoyne's talk with the Indians was the *chef d'œuvre* of wit, humour,

The House was most excited. The debate continued for seven hours, and the motion was rejected by a majority of but eighty-six. After the division, Burke made several motions for other papers and accounts, which were immediately negatived ; but, both as an orator and a politician, he had reason to exult, as he counted the diminishing Ministerial ranks.

In both Houses the Committees on the State of the Nation were continued almost from day to day. The Opposition felt that victory was before them ; it was said that Lord Chatham would soon be called once more and just satire, and almost suffocated Lord North himself with laughter, as his pathetic description of the Cis-Atlantic army

‘ Drew iron tears down Barré’s cheek.’

“ I wish I could give you an idea of that superlative oration. He was pressed to print it, but says he has not time during the session. How cold, how inadequate will be my fragment of a sketch from second, third, and thousandth hands ! yet I must send you a bit of a daub, with probably even the epithets wrong or misplaced, though each was picturesque. Well, though I can neither draw nor colour, *invenies etiam disjecta membra.* Hurlothumbro exhorted seventeen Indian nations, who, so far from understanding the Hurlothumbrie dialect, are probably almost as ignorant of English. He exhorted them by the dictates of our holy religion, and by their reverence for our Constitution, to repair to his Majesty’s standard. ‘ Where was that ? ’ said Burke. ‘ On board Lord Dunmore’s ship ? ’ And he exhorted them (I suppose by the same divine and human laws) not to touch the hair of the head of man, woman, or child, while living, though he was willing to deal with them for scalps of the dead, being a nice and distinguishing judge between the scalp taken from a dead person and the head of a person that dies of being scalped. ‘ Let us state this Christian exhortation and Christian injunction, by a more familiar picture. Suppose there was a riot on Tower Hill, what would the keeper of his Majesty’s lions do ? Would he not fling open the dens of the wild beasts, and then address them thus : My gentle lions, my humane bears, my sentimental wolves, my tender-hearted hyenas, go forth ; but I exhort ye, as ye are Christians and members of a civilized society, to take care not to hurt man, woman, or child ? ’ etc. etc.”—Correspondence of Walpole and Mason, vol. i p. 335.

to form an Administration: by others the advent of the Rockingham party to power was thought most likely. At the Club, their eloquent Member's political fortunes were earnestly discussed; and Boswell, in Edinburgh, using a word that Goldsmith had employed at a similar crisis, supposed that Burke was near his apotheosis.*

It appears strange in our days that such a Ministry should have been any longer tolerated. Every promise they made was falsified, every military expedition they sent out was unsuccessful, every hope they ventured to raise was disappointed. They were opposed in both Houses by every man with the slightest pretensions to statesmanship. They could, from the experience of the past, inspire no confidence in the future. They had wantonly engaged in the most impolitic war that England ever waged, and it was occasioning other serious wars. Their most honest supporters were shrinking from their side. Yet they managed to stand their ground. The seeds that Bolingbroke and Bute had sown sprang up at last in full luxuriance; the organized corps of King's friends blocked up every avenue by which in such an emergency truth and wisdom could approach the Throne; and the most sanguinary and most fatal consequences were yet to be seen. All that Burke had foretold as the results of seeking a revenue in America, was being fulfilled. Every day the certainty of the recognition of Colonial independence by the Bourbon Powers increased; war with them was a political contingency which could not be warded off; and the British Government had not a respectable fleet even to command the British Channel.

The money which was patriotically voted for the fleet was employed for the purposes of Parliamentary corrup-

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 207.

tion. In a debate on the Navy Estimates, a spirited member of the Opposition instanced the Dragon, of seventy-four guns, as a ship for which Parliament had voted, in the course of six years, about forty thousand pounds ; and he asked the Commissioners of the Admiralty whether it was not a fact that this very vessel was in Portsmouth harbour, almost rotten, without having had a single farthing of these large sums expended in her repairs ? The officials admitted this statement to be correct. They boldly asserted that it had never been the custom of the Admiralty, even from the time of William III., to apply the money as it was detailed in the accounts, although they laid on the table of the House a handsome gilt volume of estimates, with every item of naval expenditure apparently calculated to the utmost farthing. This work Burke had been patiently studying. Feeling that his trouble had been quite useless, he rose with the volume in his hands, expressed his astonishment at this confession of the Admiralty, and giving way to an impulse of indignation, he startled the apathetic Ministers by throwing the book at the Treasury bench. The volume, in its rapid flight, hit the candle above the table, and, glancing from the candle, came with much force into very disagreeable proximity to the shins of the precise Welbore Ellis, Treasurer of the Navy, who had just been very eloquent in defending, with all the assumption of office, these flagrant abuses.*

Burke could with impunity at length take many liberties with the House. His old assailants were all silenced. Conway, alarmed at the misconduct of the war, had joined his old friends of the Rockingham party. Rigby, feasting and drinking at the Pay Office, was only

* Parl. Hist., vol. xix. p. 730.

too happy to enjoy the luxuries of his sinecure while the hour yet was, to continue the violent assaults upon Burke in which he had formerly delighted. In fact, they would not have been tolerated. Burke had no longer to sustain the whole weight of debate on the part of the Opposition ; he was supported by many most attached friends and respectful admirers ; Fox was close at his side, ready, with vigorous logic and dashing intrepidity, to meet any assault of their enemies. With the country gentlemen discontented, and the condition of the empire growing every day more serious, the most aggressive of the courtiers, instead of acting on the offensive, was glad enough to remain quiet. Besides, even the most supercilious of hereditary politicians could not continue to regard Burke as a mere political adventurer. His splendid talents, his unswerving consistency, his honourable poverty, and the wisdom of his political speculations, daily demonstrated by events, had at this time won for him an almost unexampled position in Parliament and in the country. In the course of this month there were published in the Public Advertiser some quotations from Shakespeare, professing to hit off the most eminent politicians. The lines applied to Burke, from the character of Brutus in *Julius Cæsar*, were in the highest degree eulogistic, not merely of his great abilities, but also of his patriotic integrity.

The public might well look upon him with respect. Four days after he had flung the volume of estimates at the Ministers, Lord North gave the most ample testimony to his superior sagacity that any statesman ever received from a political opponent. The seventeenth of February, 1778, was perhaps the day of the most complete Ministerial humiliation ever witnessed within the walls

of Parliament. On that day Lord North appeared to redeem the promise he had given before Christmas, of proposing measures of conciliation. When analyzed, they resolved themselves almost literally into the thirteen resolutions Burke had moved on the twenty-second of March, 1775, just before the war began. Even the very arguments that the Ministers used in support of his propositions, were such as Burke had formerly employed in his published speech, which everybody had read. Lord North, asserting that his intentions had invariably been pacific, that he had always been convinced of the impracticability of raising a considerable revenue from the Colonies, and that he had never laid a single tax upon them, asked the House to consent to the introduction of a Bill for doing away in express words with the right of Parliamentary taxation as a means of supply, and another for appointing a Commission to proceed to America, to negotiate terms of conciliation, with full powers of promising the repeal of every obnoxious Statute that had passed, from the time of the Grenville Administration. He spoke with much ability for more than two hours. Yet his speech met with the coldest reception from those who had usually been his most clamorous supporters. Not one mark of assent came from their lips. Not a single cheer was raised, either throughout the speech, or when the Minister concluded. Struck, notwithstanding Lord North's statement to the contrary, with the contrast between the sentiments he then uttered, with all they had yet heard from him since his Government was formed, an extraordinary stillness prevailed, and blankness and dismay were painfully perceptible on the faces of all who sat upon the Ministerial benches. What, they asked themselves and each other, must have hap-

pened, to compel the Minister to make such a speech, and come forward to ask the assent of the House to measures which branded with criminal folly the whole course of policy his Government had hitherto pursued to the most extreme consequences? Had the army of Howe, as well as that of Burgoyne, been cut off; or had France and Spain boldly thrown aside the mask of neutrality, and openly espoused the cause of America?

One Member had the true key to this sudden change of policy. Private information, which had been studiously concealed from Burke because he, in Horace Walpole's opinion, was not to be trusted,* had, just before he entered the House, been communicated to Fox, that a treaty of alliance had actually been signed ten days before, between France and America. He rose after Lord North. Ironically complimenting him on having been at last converted by the arguments of the Opposition, Fox at once justly asserted that the Minister's plan of conciliation, and all the reasons that had just been so forcibly given for its adoption, had been borrowed from Mr. Burke. He feared, however, that what would most undoubtedly have been efficacious when proposed by its original author, would at this time have but little prospect of success. It was too late. He had himself been positively informed that a treaty had been signed with the Court of Versailles by the American agents; the Ministers must know something on the matter; and should not, when they brought forward conciliatory propositions, studiously conceal from the House all knowledge of a fact which, if true, must render any hopes of reconciliation utterly vain.

* Walpole's Journal, February 17th: *Memoirs and Correspondence of Fox*, vol. i. p. 173.

The announcement of Fox electrified the Treasury bench. The Opposition inveighed against the Minister. Burke claimed the scheme of conciliation as his own, and called on Lord North to give a definite answer with respect to the alleged treaty. Sir George Savile declared that the Minister's silence was criminal, and he concluded with shouting, *An answer! an answer!* This chorus was swelled by many threatening voices. Most reluctantly the Prime Minister again rose, and, while stating that he had no official intelligence of the signature of such a treaty, admitted that, though the report was vague, it was still probable. This reply only increased the anxiety of the House. No person doubted that the Minister knew more than he would allow. The two motions for the introduction of the Bills were agreed to; but, under the circumstances, none could look upon them as the harbingers of peace.

They were pushed rapidly forward. Several attempts were made to alter them for the better by the Opposition: the courtiers succeeded in altering them for the worse. Burke strongly advised the House to allow the Commissioners to be appointed by Parliament; for how, said he, could they entrust such a nomination to a Minister who publicly confessed that he had been hitherto deceived in all his expectations, and that he had failed in all his undertakings? A motion to effect this object was rejected: but in committee he moved a clause allowing the West Indian Islands to be also included in the undertaking to repeal all obnoxious statutes; and as such a proposition could hardly be refused, it was admitted into the Bill declaring the intentions of Parliament. The two Acts were sent up to the House of Lords on the second of March; and on the eleventh, that

no time might be wasted, received the royal sanction. But, just as when, in 1776, the former Commissioners had been appointed, they did not arrive in America until after the Declaration of Independence, so, two days only after the Bills had become laws, the French Ambassador officially informed the English Government that his Christian Majesty had felt it necessary to conclude a treaty of commerce and friendship with the Independent States of America.*

Lord North informed the House of Commons on the sixteenth, that he would have a Royal Message to communicate. Its purport was anticipated. The Opposition, without waiting for his Majesty's revelation, moved for all papers that had passed between the Courts of France and England on the subject of these negotiations with the revolted Colonies. Burke, in warmly seconding the motion, dwelt pathetically on the miserable state of the country. Alluding to the application of the King for the advice of his subjects in such a crisis, he instanced America as the child who might have rendered the most effective assistance to England against her foreign enemies, and finely dwelt on the reply said to have been given by the Duke of Bedford to James II., when people were welcoming the Prince of Orange:—"I had a son who could have advised your Majesty."†

The next day the Royal Message was brought down to both Houses. His Majesty told Parliament that, having been informed by the French King that he had signed a treaty with the rebellious subjects in America, he had withdrawn his Ambassador from the Court of France, and that, relying on the zeal and affection of his

* Parl. Hist., vol. xix. pp. 702-778. Annual Register, 1778, pp. 131-142. Memoirs and Correspondence of Fox, vol. i. pp. 174, 175.

† Correspondence of Walpole and Mason, vol. i. p. 351.

faithful subjects, he was determined to exert all the forces of the country to repel insult and to maintain the honour of the country. Addresses in the same tone were of course proposed and carried in both Houses; but the Rockingham party from this moment assumed a distinct position on the question of American Independence.

Burke had early in the session remarked, that this independence was in truth a fact. In this portion of the French declaration he and his friends, however much they might regret the causes which had led to it, could not but coincide. They did not, however, look on the foreign war as absolutely inevitable. They thought that, by wisely at once submitting to circumstances, negotiating an advantageous treaty of commerce, and withdrawing promptly the British forces from the United States, the humiliating dictation of foreign powers might yet be avoided, and a European war averted; or, if it should break out, England, by renouncing the impracticable claim of sovereignty, which even at best could be only nominal, might concentrate her forces against her national enemies, and recompense herself by conquests in their dominions for what she had lost by her own folly in North America. They therefore considered it most statesmanlike to recognize without delay the independence of the Colonies; and in the debates on the Address they openly advocated this bold policy.

Had the Opposition been unanimous in such a course the Ministry might have been compelled to adopt it. But the same fatal dissensions which had so much weakened the friends of America ever since the accession to office of the Rockingham Ministry, was still maintained by Lord Chatham's followers.

The great Earl was once more impracticable. Pro-

fessing himself to be the best friend of the United States, and looked upon, with regard to their interests, as the most liberal of English politicians, he would hear of no recognition of their independence; and rather than grant it, was ready to carry on the war against them and the Bourbon Powers united, and to undertake their subjugation by force of arms. There was, indeed, no middle course. Lord North had just conceded all the original objects of the quarrel. A mere substitution of one English Minister for another would not have rendered these conciliatory propositions more acceptable. In times of civil war, men live fast. The fields of blood, the proscription of provinces, the bayonet of the mercenary Hessian, and the tomahawk of the merciless savage, had, in 1778, extirpated from the breast of the leading Americans every feeling of loyalty to the British Crown. Peace without independence, was then impossible. On this point, as their respective correspondence proves, the minds of both Washington and Franklin were unalterably made up. It was as great a delusion in Chatham to imagine that, at his accession to office, such men would convert their swords into ploughshares, as it was, in 1767, for him to dream that his name would have such an influence over the King of Prussia as to extinguish the prejudices against England that her desertion in the late war had so warmly kindled in the breast of the Great Frederick.

Several communications, since the commencement of the session, had passed between Chatham and Lord Rockingham. The Marquis and the Duke of Richmond had for months made no secret of their opinions, that the recognition of independence must inevitably be made. The French treaty only confirmed their ideas.

But they also hoped that Chatham would then see that no other means remained by which the country could be saved from the greatest perils. To close finally the Committee on the State of the Nation, which he had ably carried on in the Lords, and to assert fully what he considered as the logical result of this inquiry, the Duke of Richmond, on the part of the Rockingham party, gave notice of his intention of moving, on the seventh of April, an Address to the Throne for the withdrawal of the British forces from America. This Address had been carefully framed. It was a powerful composition, and bears unmistakable evidence of Burke's pen. Two days before the time appointed, his Grace wrote a letter to Chatham, communicating his design, entering at some length into the reasons for this step, and respectfully requesting at such a crisis the unanimous support of all the real friends of England and of America.

Chatham's health had long been extremely feeble. In the autumn he had had a fit, during which he had fallen from his horse. He was then only slowly recovering from an attack of the gout, and one of his hands was still lame. He had also recently been observed to be extremely irritable; and, though he and his family did not consider his bodily indisposition more serious than usual, his medical adviser was alarmed, and wished the illustrious invalid to remain quiet. Notwithstanding this advice, the Earl characteristically determined to appear in his place on the seventh, and declare his total disagreement on this question with Lord Rockingham and his followers. How much of the alloy of human pride and mere worldly ambition mingled in this patriotic resolution, it would, under the circumstances,

perhaps be uncharitable to analyze. But overtures had been made to him from the Court. Others were daily expected. With a French war impending, he might confidently count on his services being required in the Administration. It may fairly be supposed, as consistent with all Chatham's previous conduct towards the Rockingham party, that, knowing they would appear invidiously as the advisers of the dismemberment of the empire in the eyes of George III., while he would on this point be found coinciding with the King's strongest prejudices, such considerations, when part of the Opposition might be on the threshold of office, would be no inducement to restrain him from exhibiting his disagreement with the Marquis and his friends. In truth, there was a disingenuousness in the great Earl which it is impossible to disregard. It is curious to find, in respect to this feature of the patriot's character, that men looking from such opposite political quarters as Burke and the King, fully agreed. The one deliberately wrote of him as the grand artificer of fraud, and the other, as the most perfidious of men.*

Chatham's brilliant but meteoric career was however at last to close. The Duke of Richmond made his motion. Lord Weymouth replied for the Government. Chatham then rose, but seemed labouring under severe indisposition. His speech was vague and incoherent; his voice at first almost inaudible. His memory appeared to fail him; and he sat down before he had fairly brought his oration to a close. The Duke of Richmond was not easily vanquished. Again rising, he answered the objections of Lord Weymouth; and alluding to the

* Memoirs of the Marquis of Rockingham, vol. ii. p. 195; and Memoirs and Correspondence of Fox, vol. i. p. 190.

lamentations of Chatham, declared himself ready to support him in prosecuting the war, if he would only point out the means by which it could be honourably waged. As soon as his Grace had concluded, Chatham once more prepared to address the House; but, after two or three ineffectual attempts to stand, fell backwards apparently lifeless. He was caught in the arms of Lord Temple. The Peers crowded round the prostrate body. All the House, with the exception of but one Member, appeared deeply moved at the affecting spectacle of such a fall: Lord Mansfield alone was supposed by Lord Camden to survey the scene in grim and callous silence. Burke's kind friend, Dr. Brocklesby, was near, to render medical aid. But all medical aid was in vain. In a few days the dying Earl was removed to Hayes, where, surrounded by all his family, and with all the old affection of the people revived in his favour, he expired, on the morning of the eleventh of May. Fortunate throughout his life, he was fortunate in the circumstances which invested his last seizure in the House of Lords with so much pathetic dignity; and he was, perhaps, most particularly fortunate in being called away before he was allowed to undertake, in his old-age and in such a terrible season, the impracticable and hopeless task of once more vanquishing the House of Bourbon, and attempting to induce the Americans to renounce that independence which they had virtually won, and which, both by treaty with France and by resolutions in Congress, they had solemnly bound themselves to maintain.

The evening before Chatham's illness, Sir William Meredith, in the House of Commons, had moved the repeal of that Declaratory Act which had so long been so obnoxious to the Great Commoner, and his principal

subject for his recrimination against the Rockingham party. Burke, on this ground, once more warmly defended his friends, and was loudly applauded from all sides of the House, as he argued that, as an abstract proposition, it could not be denied; that it rendered more easy the repeal of the Stamp Act; and that, however much it had since been used for evil purposes, at the time of its enactment it produced no bad effects.*

The next day, the House was sitting when the news of Chatham's death arrived in London. Barré immediately moved an Address to the Throne, that the body should be interred at the public expense. The courtiers, not venturing openly to object to such a proposal at the moment, hoped indirectly to defeat it; and Rigby, while professing respect to the Earl's memory, said that a public monument would surely be more advisable. Chatham's friends took the hint, but not in the manner the shrewd Paymaster expected. They combined both propositions in their amended motion, and it was unanimously carried. On the thirteenth, Lord North announced the gracious compliance of his Royal Master with the request of the Commons. The Rockingham party vied with Chatham's more immediate adherents in testifying their veneration for the departed statesman's character. Lord John Cavendish hoped that the public would provide for the family at Hayes. The Minister announced his readiness to act on the suggestion. Burke forgot his old enmity, and deeply affected the House by a speech which was considered equally admirable, both for the lofty eloquence and the good feeling which it displayed.†

He gave another and even more striking testimony

* Parl. Hist., vol. xix. p. 1012.

† Annual Register, 1778, p. 188.

to the memory of his old enemy. When a resolution, settling four thousand pounds a year on the heirs of Chatham's earldom, was moved, in obedience to a Royal recommendation, the Common Council of the City petitioned the House of Commons that the corpse might be interred in St. Paul's. But the monument which Parliament had voted was to be erected in Westminster Abbey ; and Rigby, in defiance of the reproachful looks of the Opposition, among whom he sat, declared that he was in no humour to compliment the City of London, and that it would be absurd to separate the monument from the remains. Barré keenly contrasted the pecuniary disinterestedness of the late Earl with Rigby's mercenary inclinations. The Paymaster was far from being put to shame. He loudly asserted that he had hands as clean, and a heart as honest, as any of his hearers. Burke supported the petition, stating that such a spacious cathedral as St. Paul's was peculiarly adapted for monuments, yet that it continued to be a mere desert, while Westminster Abbey was overcrowded. He spoke long on Chatham's public virtues. He admitted indeed that they had been environed with some dark shades, which had however, while the Earl was alive, only made the glory of his virtues shine the brighter, and which had, since his death, become to himself perfectly invisible.*

Nor was this the last mark of respect which Burke showed to the great patriot whom he had so much disliked. He was one of the pall-bearers at the funeral ; and it must have been with some very varying emotions that he saw Chatham's coffin placed in the tomb on the northern transept of Westminster Abbey.

* *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xix. p. 1233.

CHAPTER XXV.

1778.

THE HERALD OF THE FUTURE.

WITH Chatham's fall in full senate, an important political era may be said to have closed. During the month he lingered at Hayes, another epoch, with the indications of which he had little sympathy, but of which Burke was pre-eminently the apostle, had actually begun. An era of peace, of prosperity, and of toleration, was cradled amid the din of war, of defeat, and of dismay. So strangely are good and evil associated in this sublunary sphere, that the political emancipation of Ireland, which Burke had so long desired, took its origin in the calamities of that American war which he had so long foreseen and then so deeply deplored.

The pressure of this unhappy contest was naturally sooner felt by burdened and straitened Ireland than by her wealthy and dominant sister. The subjugated country staggered under the weight of her enormous civil establishment, encumbered with every form of pension and sinecure that the ingenuity of corruption and oppression could devise. The Ministers admitted that Ireland had some claims for relief; and, on the second of April, Earl Nugent, one of the defeated candidates at the last election for Bristol, and then in office, moved for a Committee to revise the Irish Laws of Trade.

Burke supported the motion. Ireland, he said, was now the chief dependency of the Crown, and at such a time it particularly behoved Great Britain to admit the Irish nation to all the privileges of British citizens.* No opposition was made to the proposal. On the very day of Chatham's seizure, the House of Commons went into this Committee. Nugent moved four resolutions, granting considerable relief to Ireland. The Colonial trade it was proposed partially to open to her, both for exportation and importation; she was to be permitted to dispose of her glass in all places but Great Britain; and to send to England, free from a heavy prohibitory duty, her cotton yarn. To these four resolutions Burke, in Committee, added a fifth, allowing the importation of Irish sailcloth and cordage.†

According to any sound notions of political economy, this was no great assistance. The resolutions aimed however at a right principle. Burke supported them as a step in the direction of a free trade between all the British dominions. The Prime Minister took no active part in the business but gave the resolutions his general assent. The Report of the Committee was readily agreed to; and the Bills were, without any difficulty, read a first time.

But the Easter holidays intervened. Members representing the great commercial towns sent, as was then customary, the Bills to their constituents, and an unexpected state of things appeared. The narrow jealousies of the provincial merchants were roused. A French invasion could not, as it appeared, have caused more alarm. The fires that John the Painter formerly kindled in Bristol did not produce a greater panic than the Bills

* Parl. Hist., vol. xix. p. 1103.

† Ibid., p. 1112.

that Burke, with every mark of approbation, transmitted to the Merchants' Hall. The city was in one flame of indignation. Whigs and Tories, the friends both of the rejected and the successful candidates at the last election, made common cause. It was never for one moment supposed that the resolutions had taken their origin in any enlightened commercial principles. The honest citizens could only ascribe to Nugent, their proposer, the diabolical motive of injuring Bristol, because they had turned him out of the representation; and to Burke, who enthusiastically supported them, the scarcely less atrocious design of promoting the interests of Ireland at the expense of England. Some of the electors had, however, a high idea of the compulsory authority of instructions to their Members; and, forgetting that Burke had altogether repudiated the obligation of such commands, they sent him positive orders, whatever his own opinions might be, to oppose the Bills on their second reading. His own friends were more respectful, but not less annoying. They assumed an expostulatory tone, hinted how much he was injuring his prospects of success at the next general election, and lamented that, in a cause of British commerce, they were not to have him as their most eloquent advocate.

He was requested to come down to Bristol, and allow himself to be convinced by the profound arguments of the merchants. Such a visit however, at such a time, he very prudently declined. He made amends for his personal absence by entering at length into the subject in his private letters to his friends and the Merchants' Hall. Two of these were published; others were shown extensively in manuscript; some were read at the Bell Club, where his political adherents assembled. It is not

easy to convince men of the propriety of measures which they believe to be injurious to their pecuniary interests. The enlightened doctrines of political economy Burke broached, and the liberal sentiments he expressed on the advantages to the commercial world of wealth and prosperity being everywhere found, were but little appreciated. Richard Champion was the only one of his friends in Bristol really satisfied with the Member's conduct. Messrs. Harford, Cowles, and Co., a firm of which the principal partner, Mr. Harford, had been his proposer at the election, gave him very unequivocally to understand, from a letter which they sent by express, and which is evidently the second of the two published in his works, that they could very easily refute his arguments if they were worth the trouble. "That," replied Burke, "is very probable." But he politely declined all controversy with Messrs. Harford, Cowles, and Co.*

His eloquence was on this subject more successful in the House of Commons. His national feelings as an Irishman, his love of justice as a philanthropist, his far-sighted devotion to the abstract doctrines of free trade as a political economist, and his aspirations for peace and union throughout the Empire as a statesman, were all powerfully interested; and they encouraged him to hazard his valued seat for Bristol, rather than to compromise principles he had maturely formed, and had first eloquently expounded in the British Senate. He was allowed on all sides to have been by far the ablest supporter of the measures. With matchless power he almost silenced the clamours of jealousy, selfishness, and prejudice; and pushed the Bills vigorously forward.† His speech on the second reading was a masterpiece of reasoning about

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 222.

† Annual Register, 1778.

political economy. The mere abstract of it which has been preserved, should be read by all who think that the assertion of the principles of free trade belong peculiarly to the advanced politician of this nineteenth century, whose amiable characteristic it is to take credit for quite as much original knowledge of political science as can be justly allowed.

Burke boldly met every argument of the opponents of the Bills. He showed that it was far from being true that the advantages of trade depended upon the lightness of taxation, or that the low price of labour was the most material advantage to the manufacturer. He maintained that Ireland, for the purposes of commerce, could never be on an equality with England until she should be as wealthy as England ; and that undeniable experience proved that manufactures were best where wages were highest. He dwelt on one of the incidents which had occurred since the business had been entered upon, as irrefragable evidence of the unsubstantial nature of the alarm which, in consequence of these proposals, had seized on the minds of the provincial merchants. Nearly all the petitioners expressed their apprehension of the importation of Irish sail-cloth, which he had himself moved as an accompaniment to the original resolutions. That Bill he had just allowed to be thrown out, because it appeared there was no real restriction on the introduction of the material into the English market, and that therefore no further legislation on the subject was required. A similar alarm had formerly prevailed when a Bill allowing the importation of woollen yarn from Ireland, was brought in ; it had however been carried through both Houses ; and everybody then admitted that its effect was beneficial. In conclusion, Burke alluded to his own situation, as a

Member who had been elected free of expense for Bristol, and yet found himself, from a sense of duty, compelled to act in opposition to the sentiments of his constituents. He appeared to anticipate that the consequences of this disagreement would be the loss of his seat for that eminent constituency; and so far from attempting by evasive language to shelter himself from such an event, he spoke of it openly with dignified pride. The lesson, he said, might do good to all the constituencies, and their representatives in England. They would behold on the one hand a senator inflexibly adhering to his opinions, against interest and popularity; and they would behold, on the other, his constituents, in the exercise of their undoubted right, rejecting him, not from corrupt motives, but because he had acted contrary to their feelings and convictions.*

The second reading was carried by a considerable majority. More than twenty Members, including the Lord Advocate for Scotland, Henry Dundas, informed Burke then and subsequently, that, although they had been strongly prejudiced against the Bills, his arguments had so powerfully influenced them as to produce an entire revolution in their opinions, and oblige them to follow him in the division. The table was, however, still covered with petitions; and counsel in their support crowded the bar. The clamour from the Jacobite towns which had been so forward in the recent subscriptions was loud; and in some of their effusions it was very clearly implied that the continuance of their new loyalty to the Hanoverian dynasty might depend on the rejection of this relief to the commerce of Ireland. Glasgow was not ashamed to deny to Dublin and Cork

* *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xix. pp. 1119-1123.

any participation in the lucrative trade with England from which her merchants and all Scotland were then so liberally profiting. The Prime Minister was not a man to offend Great Britain for the sake of justice to Ireland. From being at first lukewarm, as the opposition to the measures intensified, he grew at last hostile ; he permitted them to be curtailed of their most important provisions ; and they became, much to Burke's regret, more an earnest of future good, than any substantial relief to the immediate burdens of his native country. How little policy there was in Lord North's conduct in this as in every other proceeding of his Ministry, the events of the following year significantly showed. What he would not grant to Ireland as an act of grace, when she bent before him as a suppliant, he was compelled to grant, with many other gratifications, as an act of fear, when, taking advantage of a terrible crisis, she stood up with arms in her hands.*

But even in this session the introduction of the Bills had incalculable results. In the discussion it was found impossible to separate the commercial freedom of Ireland from the political freedom of the great majority of Irishmen. Several Members had expressed themselves in favour of granting greater indulgence to the Roman Catholics. Encouraged by such declarations, and on a general understanding that the Ministry would render no hindrance to a measure which, though they did not originate, they professed to approve, Sir George Savile moved for leave to introduce a Bill to remove some of the most grievous penalties and disabilities which had been imposed in the riot of arrogant factions, during

* See Letter to Thomas Burgh, Esq., in Burke's Works ; and the Annual Register, 1778, pp. 176 and 191.

the reign of William III. He was ably seconded by Dunning. The motion was agreed to almost without a single objection from any side of the House. The Bill was introduced. It was read a first time, it was read a second time, it was read a third time. The day had not yet arrived when, taking advantage of the prejudices of George III., the leaders of the Tory party saw that the maintenance of the Catholic disabilities might be turned to account against their political opponents. This inauguration of a new policy met with general assent. Scarcely a whisper against the loyalty of the Roman Catholics, or against the religion to which they were devoted, was heard in the House of Commons. Members seemed influenced by an honourable rivalry to expunge from the Statute Book the foul stains of sectarian rancour; and those who were most prominent in the discussions only regretted that the measure of relief did not go far enough.

Charles Turner, again obeying the noble instincts of his generous nature, expressed in homely phrases the most liberal and enlightened sentiments. He declared that it was cruel to reduce men who were free by nature to a state of slavery by law; and infamous to make religion the instrument of that servitude. He hoped to see the day when the Protestant Dissenters, the Roman Catholics, and every other religious denomination would be alike free, and equal toleration be legally extended to all the subjects of the British Crown.*

Another Bill, more directly relating to Ireland, was introduced by Lord Richard Cavendish. It repealed the Act of King William, disabling the Catholics from having any interest in the last forfeited lands; and gave

* *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xix. p. 1143.

Burke more peculiar pleasure than even the Bill applying particularly to the English Roman Catholics, because, without such a measure, nothing effectual could be done for Ireland, and because it held out the gratifying example of the nearest brother of one of the great Whig Dukes, who, from their position with regard to the Revolution and King William, were vulgarly considered more directly associated with the maintenance of the penal laws, taking the lead in advocating the repeal of these stringent disabilities.*

The Bills had not yet become law, when the tolerating disposition of the English Legislature had in fact its influence on the Irish Parliament. As soon as the first was printed, Burke sent copies of it over to his Irish friends, and on the twenty-seventh of May a motion was made in the Irish House of Commons for leave to bring in the heads of a similar Bill to the one then in progress through the two Houses at Westminster. The measure, in its principal provisions, was, as Burke said, not quite so liberal as its English prototype; but still the relief was great, and the principle most extensive in its application. Roman Catholics were to be permitted to hold leases of land for nine hundred and ninety-nine years, with full powers of testamentary disposal and direct inheritance. The shameful enactment empowering the conforming son of a Catholic proprietor to make his father a tenant for life, was also effectually disposed of; and a clause was added, not with the best intentions, repealing the Sacramental test before accepting employment under the Crown, both in the cases of the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Dissenter. As might have been expected, the Bill, though patronized by the Go-

* Letter to Garret Nagle, in *New Monthly Magazine*, vol. xvi. p. 157.

vernment, of which the Earl of Buckinghamshire had become the Lord-Lieutenant, and had made his attorney and law agent the Chief Secretary, did not pass so easily through the Irish Parliament as its original through the British Legislature. The bigotry of the Orangemen was roused ; and even the enlightened and humane Lord Charlemont objected to some of the clauses.* But still this resistance was successfully encountered. Just as the English session terminated, the heads of this measure, as passed through the Irish Houses, were sent over to England for the approbation of his Majesty and the British Government.

Here, unfortunately, the most serious difficulties commenced. The clause against the Test Act was inserted in favour of the Dissenters, ostensibly for the purpose of giving them an interest in the measure, and inducing them to make common cause with the objects of their inveterate animosity. Yet this very clause at once alarmed the conscience of George III., and prejudiced him strongly against the whole Bill. The Ministers had hitherto been almost as liberal in their sentiments on toleration as even Burke could have desired them to be ; but some of them began, naturally of course, to sympathize with the scruples of their conscientious Sovereign. Rumours of dissension or hesitation in counsel were prevalent among those who were interested in the results of the proposed enactment. Its fate became extremely uncertain.

Burke had left town for the summer, trusting that the great principle of toleration was safe. As even the Irish Bill had been supported by the officials of the Castle, and in fact could not have been carried with-

* Hardy, vol. i. p. 372.

out their approval, he had supposed that there would be no obstacle to meet it on this side of St. George's Channel. He found himself mistaken. He received a letter from Wedderburne, who had just been made Attorney-General in place of Thurlow, himself appointed Lord Chancellor, informing him that the Bill had arrived in town, but as he feared its progress would not be what he desired, requesting Burke to give him at once a history of the tests, as of all men the one who knew most on the subject, and who could at once supply the place of indexes of references and volumes of statutes.* Nothing indicates more clearly than this application, how high was his authority already even on the subject of toleration, which the clever but superficial Attorney-General acknowledges to be peculiarly Burke's own province.

Wedderburne knew his man. Burke's summer amusements in his fields were at once laid aside, and he was again aroused to energetic action. He had never opened his lips in the successive stages of the English Bills, because, as their reception might be considered unanimous, there were no enemies to encounter. But when he learned that the Irish Bill was in danger, he applied every faculty he possessed to remove the unexpected impediments which threatened to stop it in the midst of an apparently prosperous career. He communicated fully his thoughts to Wedderburne by return of post, strongly recommending the whole Bill. He went up to town. In Westminster Hall he saw the new Solicitor-General, James Wallace, and urged every topic, and with all the power he could command, to prevail upon him to give it his support. From Westminster Hall, he pro-

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 226.

ceeded to the house of the Lord Chancellor, to see what he could do with the bold and systematic Thurlow. He was, however, not at home ; and Burke had to return immediately to Beaconsfield.

A letter followed him from the Chancellor. Thurlow had supposed Burke was still in town, and, on hearing of his call, had written to him inviting him to dinner, in order to converse on this Toleration Bill. As soon as his engagements would permit him, Burke again took horse for London. On the very day of his arrival, he was alarmed by a report that the Ministers had determined on rejecting the whole Bill. Full of anxiety, he hurried to the Treasury, and attempted to make Sir Grey Cooper participate in his apprehensions of the terrible calamities which the rejection of the measure might occasion. Thence he went to Lord North's, and had a long and earnest conversation with the Prime Minister, urging every argument in favour of a general toleration, and especially advocating the clause repealing the Sacramental test. Lord North was very polite, very cool, and very patient. He was not one however to comprehend all the bearings of the question with the grasp of the great philosophic statesman ; still less was he one to press vigorously any measure which, however salutary to the Empire, he knew to be personally obnoxious to his Sovereign. This, though Burke did not then know it, and Lord North could not decently confess it, was the real hitch. The Prime Minister parried Burke's powerful assaults by stating that the Established Religion ought to be the religion of the State, and that the leading clergy of the Church of England would be much offended with this indulgence to the Irish Dissenters. Besides, asked he, would not the repeal of the Sacra-

mental test in that country be immediately taken advantage of by the Opposition here, as the reason for a similar repeal in England?

Burke said he did not see the weight of this argument from analogy. The circumstances of the two countries were different. Neither was he aware that the Opposition had then any intention of introducing a Bill into the English Legislature, to effect a similar repeal; but he candidly confessed, that were such a measure to be proposed, he could not refrain from giving it his support. He found that all he said had but little effect on the imperturbable Minister, on whose easy temper the most powerful arguments, even in a great emergency, had as little effect as cannon-balls on a mountain of sand. Burke then tried to induce the Minister to consent to the repeal of the Test Act, only so far as related to military and revenue offices, which, he maintained, might be shown to belong to the economy and execution, rather than the administration of affairs. "This distinction," said the Minister, "deserves to be considered." But he met all Burke's enthusiastic importunity with much passive diplomacy, only the more provoking because it was unassailable. Fearing that, notwithstanding all he had said, the Bill might yet be wholly rejected, as nothing in Lord North's language or manner contradicted such a supposition, Burke then produced a private letter he had received on the ninth of July from the Right Honourable Edmund Pery, the Speaker of the Irish House of Commons. It dwelt, with much statesmanlike ability, on the importance of the opportunity for conciliating all sections of the Empire; the impossibility, if the measure were wholly rejected, of again carrying into effect any pro-

posal for the relief of the Irish Catholics ; and the disaffection which would inevitably be kindled in the minds both of the Catholics and Dissenters, who could not but then unite against the British Government as their common enemy. Burke, as a last resource, deliberately read the epistle, which, as coming from a man of great authority in the Irish Legislature, had its weight.

On the same evening he saw Thurlow. There was a scene similar to that with Lord North in the morning, but with more vehement action on the part of the Chancellor. Thurlow, after his sonorous fashion, declaimed against all combinations of Dissenters and Catholics to distress the Government. He expressed himself, however, ready to grant them separately every proper indulgence ; but he thought that the Bill under consideration was of very little value. Again Burke pulled out Pery's letter, to fortify his own eloquence, and it also had its effect on the mind of the resolute Chancellor.

Burke at length returned to Beaconsfield. He had done all that one energetic man could do, to persuade his political opponents to rise above their natural mediocrity, and act wisely for Ireland. Yet thinking that he had not even yet done enough, he could not sink into repose, but again wrote earnestly to the Treasury, recapitulating what he had said, and renewing his exhortations in favour of the Bill.

But, though he was then unacquainted with the fact, it was in the King's closet that his arguments were producing the most effect. The Address and Petition to the Throne which he had drawn up in 1764 for his Roman Catholic countrymen, and which, before leaving Ireland during the Duke of Northumberland's Administration, he had left with Dr. John Curry, had ever since

remained in that gentleman's possession. As the question was agitated in Parliament, this paper was read over by him with renewed interest; and he found it so masterly a production in style and force of reasoning, and so affecting and respectful in its tone, that it occurred to him it might be of some use in the high quarter for which it had formerly been intended. It was laid before the Lord-Lieutenant, with a request that he would transmit it to his Majesty. This was actually done. The paper was said to have had a most powerful effect, even on the mind of George III., and, more than any other arguments, induced him finally to approve of the Bill.*

Burke's labour was therefore far from being entirely in vain. While the Ministers seemed utterly apathetic, and while Charles Fox, after the fatigues of the session, had not energy enough to put on his clothes, but was lying almost naked on a sofa all day during the hot summer weather, and lazily reading Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws*, Burke was as active as ever in the cause of the oppressed; finding law for the Attorney-General, enlightened arguments on high policy for the Prime Minister, and eloquent and dutiful petitions to soften the obdurate prejudices of the King. The clause repealing the Sacramental test, which had really been inserted by the enemies of toleration in the hope that it would cause the rejection of the Bill, was struck out; but in other respects the measure was returned to Ireland, stamped with the approbation of his Majesty and the Privy Council. It then passed as a completed Bill through the Irish House of Commons by a majority of thirty-eight; and through the House of Lords by a majority

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 237.

of sixteen. As an Act of Parliament, it was transmitted to Burke on the eighteenth of August, and he was then informed how much the production of his pen in 1764 had contributed to the great result.

Ireland knew in part how nobly he had pleaded her cause. His support of the commercial resolutions and the unpopularity he had encountered among his constituents at Bristol, for acting as he had done, were known to all the world. His less apparent but not less earnest efforts in the cause of Catholic emancipation, were known to a few; and on being spoken of by them, the whole of the oppressed race considered him as their champion. His countrymen did not allow their gratitude to assume the most delicate form of expression. Sometime afterwards, Dr. John Curry was commissioned on the part of his fellow-religionists, to inform Burke that a Bill of Exchange for three hundred guineas would be sent to him as part of an acknowledgment of their obligations. The money immediately followed: but it was as unhesitatingly returned. The citizens of Dublin, on the other hand, thought of erecting a statue to him; but this also he positively declined, as an honour which "belonged exclusively to the tomb, the natural and only period of human inconstancy." He also added, "The same hands that erect frequently pull down the statue." Many months had not passed away, before he had reason to congratulate himself on having, at this holiday of his popularity, restrained such enthusiastic testimonies of public applause.*

To his own Roman Catholic relatives in Ireland, he poured out all the joyous fulness of his heart at the first

* See Letter to Thomas Burgh, Esq., on New Year's Day, 1780, in Burke's Works.

triumph over the monstrous code of political and social degradation. He delayed writing to Garret Nagle until the Bill had finally passed; but on the twenty-fifth of August he sat down to congratulate his cousin on the victory that was at last secure. No event of his time, he said, had given him so much pleasure. "You may now," he continued, "raise up your heads, and think yourselves men. The mask is taken off. You are now, for the first time, acknowledged as subjects, and protected as such. Laws, indeed, cannot make men rich or happy. That they must do for themselves. But the law now leaves their natural faculties free. Whatever inheritance has come to them from their ancestors is not made any longer the instrument of distracting the peace and destroying the credit of their families. Those who having nothing but the means of acquiring substance, their industry, skill, and good economy, have those means left free. It is your interest at this time to show that the favour you have received has produced the best effects imaginable; that you are truly attached to the Constitution which has opened its doors to receive you; that you are modest and placable to those whose opinions have induced them to oppose your relief; and that you are thoroughly grateful to those whose humanity and enlarged sentiments have made that opposition useless."*

He said nothing of the active part he had himself taken in producing this result. He was only too ready to allow others the credit of his own endeavours. He had, for a moment, contemplated taking, during the summer, a trip over to Ireland, and surprising Garret among his woods, waters, and mountains. Family affairs

* Letter to Garret Nagle, August 25th, 1778, published in New Monthly Magazine, vol. xvi. p. 156.

had prevented the expedition ; and he was soon called to attend again to the American business, which, unlike his exertions for the oppressed Catholics, could afford few circumstances of satisfaction, and no materials for congratulatory letters.

CHAPTER XXVI.

1778-1779.

THROUGH KEPPEL'S AGONY OF GLORY.

WASHINGTON and his army had spent the winter in a bleak encampment at Valley Forge. Riot and luxury, on the other hand, prevailed in the British quarters at Philadelphia. The unenterprising character of Sir William Howe was at last evident, even to his employers; and in the spring he was superseded in his command by Sir H. Clinton, whose valour and capacity had been signally evinced in most of those great misfortunes, called British victories, which had been fought and won in this warfare against British Colonies. Meanwhile, the gallant army that had surrendered, under the Convention of Saratoga, had been treated with but little generosity. Taking advantage of a request which the officers made, to change the place of embarkation, the American Congress thought fit, at last, to accuse them of meditating a violation of the treaty; and therefore, with strange logic, refused themselves to comply with the stipulations, until they were formally ratified by the British Government. This flagrant breach of public faith on the part of the rising Republic, though American writers generally pass over it very lightly, gave Burke, who had shown himself so true a friend to America, much real pain. He thought there could be nothing more impolitic in a new Govern-

ment, than to show a disregard of those solemn engagements which hold together the separate members of the great civilized commonwealth of the world.*

Burgoyne was indeed permitted to return to England on parole. It was rumoured that Fox had gone to meet him, on his landing on the British shore; and, as they travelled together to the capital in a post-chaise, persuaded him to cast in his lot with the Opposition.† But, in truth, Burgoyne did not need any persuasion. The Ministers had unequivocally exhibited a desire to throw on him the responsibility of the failure of his expedition; and it was naturally to be expected that the unfortunate General should endeavour to clear himself from blame. He was also a Member of Parliament; and, in spite of the objections of Wedderburne, that, under the circumstance of his surrender, and being under parole to another Government, he could not legally act in his Parliamentary capacity, Burgoyne, in the later portion of the session, appeared in the House, and was the cause of some warm debates. In the recriminatory accusations of Ministerial incompetence, Fox took the lead. Burke generally remained quiet until called up by some flippancy of the Prime Minister, or some blunder of his doughty champions, the Attorney and Solicitor Generals.

These discussions, however, produced less effect than might fairly have been expected, from the strong case against the Ministers. At this time, disgraceful as the management of the war in the Colonies had been, American affairs became somewhat of secondary interest. With a French war in prospect, and an invasion expected, the political horizon of Englishmen narrowed; and their

* *Annual Register, 1778.*

† *Wraxall's Historical Memoirs, vol. ii. p. 291.*

eyes, fatigued with straining across the Atlantic, became fixed on the French harbours at the other side of the British Channel. A Declaration of War had not immediately followed the official announcement of the Treaty with the United States. The English Ambassador had been recalled; he had even been stopped, in crossing from Boulogne, by an embargo laid on British shipping; but each Government, while fitting out great fleets, appeared anxious to gain time.

The southern counties were studded with camps. Militia regiments took the field; and the cocked hat and scarlet uniform everywhere met the eye. The gallant officers execrated the French, professed great devotion to King George, swore awfully, and banqueted luxuriously. They made amends for their hard drilling in the morning by deep drinking in the evening; and in the crisis of their country's fate, considered it an honour to be carried to bed dead-drunk from beneath the table. The interference of France in the American war, though it increased tremendously the odds against which England had to contend, and demonstrated to absurdity the impolicy and hopelessness of the contest, was, so far at least, beneficial, that it infused a national spirit into what had hitherto been a dreary and suicidal domestic conflict; and, by awakening the old feeling of rivalry, and the recollection of former triumphs, called forth the wonted courage and determination of the proud Mistress of the Seas to hurl a dogged defiance, both at her disobedient children and her foreign foes, closely leagued together in an unnatural and portentous union.

She trusted of course to that unrivalled navy, of which she had been so proud, and which she justly regarded as her right arm. In the course of the war hitherto, it had

served the purpose of transporting armies and maintaining communications between great continents; but the British sailors had vainly longed for an antagonist on their natural element. Now however fleets would again meet fleets, and enemies encounter enemies, off the coasts of North America and in the West Indies, on the wide ocean and in the narrow seas. Who then was to command the Channel fleet? This became a question of great importance. On the right answer to it the honour of the British flag, and even the security of the country from invasion, were known directly to depend. All England rejoiced when it was announced that the command of this fleet would be accepted by a distinguished Admiral, who, though politically hostile to the Ministry, and conscientiously holding himself aloof from the contest with the Colonies, had not deemed it right to withhold his services to his country when threatened by another combination of the House of Bourbon. The character and career of Admiral Keppel require especial delineation in pages which should profess to contain some intelligible though imperfect idea of the Life and Times of Burke.

Descended from a noble Dutch family, the grandfather of Keppel was given to England with the Revolution. As the friend and favourite of William III., a brave soldier and a fascinating courtier, this ancestor was created first Earl of Albemarle. His son and successor, a man of very similar type, was even pointed out by Lord Chesterfield, as an edifying example of how far pleasing manners would go in attaining worldly success. Augustus Keppel, whose virtues Burke has blazoned in such undying colours, was this second Earl's second son. Born in 1725, at the early age of ten years he went on the quarter-deck as a midshipman. He was steeled to all

the hardships of his noble profession in sailing round the world, in the *Centurion*, with Anson, by whom he was made a Lieutenant for the bravery and coolness he displayed in action against a Spanish galleon. On his return, promotion rapidly followed. At twenty-four he was sent, as commodore and ambassador, to demand satisfaction of the piratical states of Barbary, to which England, in order to acquire a share in the carrying trade of the Mediterranean, stooped to pay an ignominious tribute. Putting into Plymouth for repairs, he paid a visit to Mount Edgcumbe, and was, by the noble owner of this beautiful seat, there introduced to a young artist, whose reputation had not then spread much further than the walls of his native town; but who, as Sir Joshua Reynolds, was to become famous throughout the world, and remain, during their lives, the common friend of both Keppel and Burke. The Commodore invited the painter to accompany him to the Mediterranean, allowed him the free use of his cabin and books, and afforded him the first opportunity of studying the great Italian masters, in whose steps he was so ambitious of treading.

As soon as Keppel arrived at Algiers, he went ashore on his mission to the Dey. Astonished at the diminutive figure and youthful appearance of the Ambassador, the huge Mussulman expressed some surprise that the King of England should have sent on such an errand a beardless boy. "Had my master," replied the young Commodore, "supposed that wisdom was measured by the length of the beard, he would have sent your Deyship a he-goat." The Dey, enraged at such audacity, called for his mutes. Keppel calmly looked out of the window, and pointed to the English squadron anchored in the Bay, and within gun-shot of the palace: "If," said

he, “I am put to death, there are Englishmen enough on board to make me a glorious funeral pile.” The menace had its effect; and the intrepid but not very diplomatic Commodore departed in safety. True or untrue, this anecdote obtained great currency in England, and at least shows what opinion of Keppel his countrymen then entertained.*

That opinion was subsequently increased by many gallant and generous services. He served with distinction in North America, and proved in General Braddock’s campaign, that on the salt-water of the ocean and on the fresh-water lakes of the great continent, his zeal and ingenuity were equally indefatigable. He was the junior Captain in the court-martial on Admiral Byng, and, finding that the authorities were really determined to carry the extreme sentence into effect, manfully endeavoured to save the life of that unfortunate officer. Cruising at one time in the Bay of Biscay, he fell in with a portion of a French convoy. He immediately attacked the largest vessel. He was hit in the leg during the engagement, and fell down upon the deck; the sailors in alarm crowded round the wounded Commodore, and wished to carry him into the cockpit; but he took out his handkerchief, tied it round the limb, and called for a chair, saying, that since he could not stand, he must sit. He then pointed to his bandaged leg, and gaily observed, “This may spoil my dancing, but not my stomach for fighting.” The enemy was soon compelled to strike her colours.

Such a man could not but be a favourite with his men. In truth, no naval commander was ever more loved by all who sailed under him than Keppel. Being selected by Pitt, in 1758, to command an expedition

* Northeote’s Life of Reynolds, vol. i. pp. 32, 33.

against the French settlements of Senegal and Goree, as soon as the Commodore's broad pennant was hoisted for the first time at the mast-head, all the sailors of the squadron saluted it with three hearty cheers. The result justified their confidence. After a terrific bombardment, Goree capitulated, and the French were expelled from all their possessions on the coast of Africa. During the next year, in that dark and stormy night of November, when Hawke destroyed the fleet of Conflans, amid the shoals and reefs on the coast of Brittany, Keppel's ship, The Torbay, was among the foremost of the eight British vessels to which alone the glory of that great victory could be ascribed. While he was fighting yard-arm to yard-arm with The Theseus, one of the finest ships in the French navy, the water poured into her lower-deck ports, and she suddenly sank. The Torbay was in imminent danger of a similar catastrophe, when a seasonable squall cleared her of the sea. Keppel however had scarcely time to rejoice at his escape, when he was informed that all the powder was wet. "Then I am sorry I am safe," pathetically exclaimed the Commodore. He was however soon afterwards told that a small quantity had been found uninjured. "Very well," he replied, "then attack again."*

After the accession of George III. Keppel commanded the naval portion of the expedition against Belleisle. He gave in that undertaking no less satisfaction to Mr. Pitt and the Government than to the British General with whom he co-operated. Nor did Keppel's services cease with the retirement of the great Minister from the direction of the war. He was second in command of the fleet sent against the Havannah; and powerfully con-

* Walpole's George II., vol. ii. p. 395.

tributed, by his skill and audacity, to the reduction of that important town. Glory, however, was not all that he acquired in Cuba. The pestilential fever, which swept off so many brave men, did not spare the Commodore. His constitution had already been much weakened by the hardships he had undergone in his voyage round the world as a midshipman, and it was at length almost ruined by the effects of this terrible epidemic. His life was henceforth a long disease. He was a walking skeleton of no formidable dimensions. The sailors familiarly and proudly called him Little Keppel. His face was so much disfigured by a blow which he had long ago received in a scuffle with footpads, and which had broken the bridge of his nose, that most persons on first seeing him felt inclined to laugh. But all who knew him loved him. Humane, considerate, brave, sensitive, high-spirited, proud of the nobleness of his origin, but courteous in his demeanour to all who approached him, after thirty years of the hardest and most dangerous service that the most plebeian officer, whose only fortune was his commission, could possibly undergo, the British navy had produced no finer specimen of the aristocratic sailor.

With the peace, Keppel, like most persons of his rank in society, gave his attention to politics. He had, during his intervals of leisure, sat in the House of Commons; and the same virtues which had made him the favourite of the navy directed his conduct in Parliament. During the Rockingham Administration he was a Lord of the Admiralty; and, at the request of his chief, remained with other members of the party in Chatham's Government, until they were absolutely driven from office by the Prime Minister's supercilious impracticability. It is indeed remarkable, that, though Keppel and his friend Sir

Charles Saunders had both acquired their glory and pre-eminence under the auspices of Pitt as War Minister, yet these two most distinguished naval officers remained steadily the devoted adherents of Lord Rockingham. On all the great political questions which were agitated from 1767, Keppel firmly supported the Marquis and his party. He had early formed a warm friendship with Burke, who fully recognized the gallant Admiral's chivalrous spirit, and loved him with all the ardour of his nature. In return, while the great majority of politicians only regarded Burke as an interested adventurer, and, instead of admitting that he was the greatest political thinker then living, would only allow him to be an eloquent orator, fond of florid metaphors, this plain sailor, whose life had been spent on the quarter-deck and who had never made literature nor politics his study, was thoroughly impressed with the conviction that the jealously depreciated Irishman was the master-mind of the age. After one of Burke's great but futile endeavours to check the fatal policy which at length resulted in that war of which even the most insensible courtiers were at last compelled to acknowledge the disastrous consequences, Keppel, in going home at night with a friend from the House of Commons, earnestly lamented that Burke's warnings should produce so little effect upon the majority that was driving hard to the ruin of their country; and he solemnly declared his belief, that if England were to be saved at all, it could only be by the efforts of that wonderful man.

To the American war, indeed, Keppel had been one of the firmest opponents. Feeling that this was one of the rare occasions when, in a free country, the Admiral should be subordinate to the politician, he sacrificed his

hopes of advancement in the profession he so much loved, braved his Sovereign's displeasure, saw with equanimity younger officers promoted over his head, and positively refused to take the command of any of the naval armaments which were sent out against the American Colonists, whom he regarded as his fellow-subjects and fellow-countrymen, struggling in a righteous cause for their political liberties.

Yet sympathy for the Americans was far from extinguishing Keppel's feelings as an Englishman. He was at heart a true patriot. The Government, knowing this feature of his character, inquired, by command of the King, in the November of 1776, whether, in the event of the Bourbons siding with the Americans, he would have any objections to hoist his flag on our own seas. Decidedly hostile to the Ministry, but loyal to the Crown, Keppel replied, that he could only answer the question in a personal interview with the King. He was admitted into the closet, and at the express desire of George III. accepted the eventual command of the Channel Fleet. Sixteen months passed away. As war with France had not openly been declared, nothing had been done; no ships had been fitted out for the Home Station, and Keppel had received not a single communication from the Admiralty. But in the March of 1778, after the official announcement of a treaty of alliance between France and America, the recall of the ambassadors, and the embargo on shipping, it was clear that no time was to be lost, and he was asked whether he was ready to proceed to Portsmouth. At an interview with Lord Sandwich, the First Lord of the Admiralty, Keppel was assured that a large fleet was ready, and that nothing should be wanting to its efficiency.

But the Admiral's political friends had many forebodings from the first moment that they learnt his services were to be employed. They felt that his reputation, won by so many years of arduous service, was at the mercy of a man who, as in the case of Wilkes, had hesitated at no act of treachery, and who would not scruple to cover his neglect and mismanagement of the naval department by sacrificing the best officer that ever sailed under his Majesty's commission. "I would determine not to trust Lord Sandwich for a piece of rope-yarn," wrote the Duke of Richmond to Keppel; and there was only too much reason for this friendly caution.*

Keppel went down to Portsmouth. Instead of the great fleet that he had been promised as ready for sea, he found but six ships of the line in a condition to meet an enemy. Resolved to make the best of everything, he made no complaint, but returned to London, and gave every friendly suggestion to the Admiralty that the circumstances required. A respectable fleet of some twenty sail of the line was assembled by the month of June. But in the meanwhile the French were not idle. Both at Brest and Toulon every exertion was made to hurry forward their armaments. While the King of England and the great officers of state were amusing themselves with a naval review, the Toulon fleet, under Admiral D'Estaing, was permitted to sail unmolested to America, though the Ministers had long been informed of the destination of this expedition, and twelve sail of the line would have effectually barred its passage through the Straits of Gibraltar.†

* *Life of Keppel*, by the Hon. and Rev. Thomas Keppel, vol. ii. p. 4.

† See the interesting paper Keppel afterwards drew up for Lord Rockingham, on the mismanagement of the Navy.—*Life*, vol. ii. p. 332.

On the 13th of June Keppel sailed from St. Helen's. His courageous prudence was soon put to the test. He fell in with two French frigates, which, believing that they had been sent to observe him, though war had not been declared, he determined to seize. One was captured; the second, after a warm chase and a fierce engagement, managed to run in shore. The next morning he incurred a similar responsibility by detaining another vessel, which had evidently been despatched to watch his movements. From their papers he learnt to his surprise that the fleet he had been ordered out to meet with twenty sail of the line, numbered thirty-two ships, with three times his quantity of frigates. His instructions positively enjoined him, in the event of his finding the enemy superior in number, to return home for reinforcements. Nothing could have justified him in risking a defeat in such circumstances; for the British shores might have been at the mercy of an invader, and by no human power could another fleet at that time have been prepared. Keppel sailed back to St. Helen's. The newspapers in the pay of the Government abused him for having returned from his station, and the Admiralty diplomatically expressed neither praise nor blame of his conduct; but a few days afterwards he again put to sea with twenty-four ships of the line, and was speedily joined by other six vessels.

The two fleets were now almost equal in force. The French had sailed from Brest the day before Keppel left Portsmouth. Extending as both armaments did over so many miles, they soon fell in with each other. The English formed in line of battle. The French Admiral, D'Orvilliers, appeared at first not averse to a regular engagement, but probably finding his adversary stronger

than he had expected, soon changed his determination, and manœuvred to defeat Keppel's manifest intentions. Night closed in. The wind freshened. When the light of morning returned, the French had increased their distance from their enemy, and were bearing away on the weather gauge with all their canvas set. Keppel at once gave the signal to chase, and, that it might be done more effectually, he at last found it necessary to take down the signal for keeping the line. For four days this pursuit was spiritedly maintained. On the dawn of the 27th of July, the fleets were found three miles apart, with the French still pressing to windward, and the English resolutely following them up. In the forenoon some sudden changes of wind, and the rapid evolutions which were consequently occasioned in the two fleets, brought them nearer and nearer to each other, until the French Admiral saw that an engagement of some kind could not be obviated. Anxious however to render it as little decisive as possible, he, instead of taking in sail and forming a line of battle, commanded his fleet to change its course, and his ships stood off on the opposite tack to that which they had hitherto pursued. This manœuvre brought on a desultory but fierce conflict, in which the two fleets, sailing to contrary points of the compass, cannonaded each other as they passed. They both suffered much; but from the manner in which they engaged, no positive result was produced.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon before the vessels were all out of action. Every exertion was made by Keppel, himself in command of the centre division, and Sir Robert Harland, in command of the van, to wear round and renew the engagement. But as soon as the smoke had cleared away, it was seen that the rear divi-

sion, commanded by Sir Hugh Palliser, a Vice-Admiral of the Blue, and a Lord of the Admiralty, was still on the contrary tack, and far out of the line which Keppel had signalled to be formed ahead. Some of the ships, indeed, had fallen so much to leeward that they were in danger of being cut off, had not a rapid diagonal movement of the Admiral checked a demonstration of the enemy. The sun was fast sinking on the western horizon, and notwithstanding that the signal had been kept constantly flying, and that even a direct message had been sent to him, Sir Hugh Palliser made no endeavour to come into the line. An explosion had occurred on board his own ship, which was much damaged; but making every allowance for the effects of this accident, the conduct of this commander, who had hitherto been a warm private friend of Keppel, though his political opponent, and who was unquestionably a brave and vigorous officer, remains singularly inexplicable. At last night came. A thick and unusual darkness for the month of July covered the seas, and hid the rival fleets from each other. At dawn, the topmasts of the French fleet could only be dimly discerned in the far distance, as it was making all sail to the French shores. Pursuit being hopeless, when the enemy was on his own coast, Keppel disconsolately sailed back to Plymouth, to refit his crippled vessels.

His political friends had, of course, looked with much anxiety for the news of the anticipated engagement. Lord Rockingham was in town, and immediately wrote to Burke, informing him of the result, which, though not decisive, none at that time considered inglorious. The French indeed claimed the victory; but they had unquestionably abandoned the seas to their enemies: and a

pompous account which their Government gave of the event, accompanied with a statement from their Admiral, that he had the next day found himself off Brest harbour by mistake, appeared to the majority of Englishmen, and to Burke, most ridiculous. He hastened to join Lord Rockingham in London. With no forebodings of any accusations against Keppel's conduct as an officer, they drank many bumpers to the health of the gallant Admiral and his brave captains. On returning to Beaconsfield, Burke wrote his congratulations to Keppel himself; and gave, in some eloquent sentences, the philosophical moral of this naval campaign, so far as it had yet been conducted. "My dear Admiral," said he, "you have twice saved us in one summer: once by retreating, and once by fighting. The disciplined mob of Court runners in the City thought proper for some time to censure the conduct to which we owe it that the neglect of their employers was not as mischievous as it was inexcusable; but the appearance of the French fleet off Ushant has shown your wisdom and their folly. At present, they only venture to whisper that you might have done more; but in this whisper the courtiers do not venture to support them: they only show, by their extravagant expectations, what an opinion they have of you, in spite of their teeth. Every honest man, every man of judgment, congratulates you and himself, with a sedate joy, on this great and eminent advantage. The designs which this fleet of the enemy were to second, are defeated, and the honour of our flag completely secured."* Burke also expressed his hopes that the future had many victories in store for Keppel; but these sanguine anticipations were not destined to be fulfilled.

* Keppel's Life, vol. ii. p. 57.

All despatch was used in refitting the fleet. The French were however at sea for a week before Keppel could again weigh anchor. He then endeavoured, by every means, to procure intelligence of their position; but weeks passed away, and no enemy appeared in sight. D'Orvilliers, relying on being joined next year by a Spanish armament, had no disposition again to seek another encounter that autumn with the British fleet. He went to the South, leaving the commerce and shores of France exposed. After two months of anxious cruising, Keppel, at the approach of winter, reluctantly returned home once more, without having had another of those great opportunities for which a true British Admiral so ardently sighs, but has generally so long to wait.

In America the result of the summer's campaign was, both in a military and diplomatic point of view, still less satisfactory. When the Commissioners for Peace arrived at Philadelphia, they found the English General, at the command of the Ministry, making preparations for retreating from the town. Negotiations commenced under such circumstances could have but small prospect of success. A passport for the Secretary of the Commissioners was refused. In vain they brought forth all their powers. In vain they pledged the name of their Sovereign for the most ample and complete concessions, only reserving a nominal supremacy to the British Government. The Congress passed resolutions that no terms of peace could be considered, unless the independence of America were previously acknowledged, or the fleets and armies of England withdrawn from the soil of the United States. To this stern issue had the dissensions between Great Britain and America at length come, which would at one time have been accommodated by the repeal of the miser-

able duty on tea. The Colonists were no longer, either in name or in feeling, British subjects. Franklin and Washington spoke most scornfully of the Commission and all the terms that could be proposed. But three years had gone since the province of New York had sent its last remonstrance and petition to Great Britain ; not three years had gone since Burke had moved his last Conciliatory Bill, which proposed to concede much less than the Commissioners now offered to relinquish, and which would have restored peace, while their proposals only produced insult. Accompanying a retreating army, and letting fly at random what Burke called their Parthian shafts of manifestoes and remonstrances, his Majesty's Commissioners found themselves objects of contempt. The efforts of one of them, Governor Johnstone, to open indirect negotiations with individuals, was not more successful than their public overtures. He was charged with attempting to bribe those American patriots whom he had hitherto held up as models of heroic virtue ; as the Congress resolved that no communications should be entered into with him, he from that time declared them to be infamous scoundrels, and threw up his office as Commissioner. The last act of these Commissioners was the worst. Finding all their friendly professions unavailing, they changed their tone ; and issued a proclamation in which war and vengeance, in newer features and their most extreme forms, were denounced, in the name of England, against her rebellious offspring.

The truth was, that since the arrival of the Commissioners, the war had altogether changed its aspect. It was no longer, even in America, a mere civil contest between the Colonies and the Parent State. On the 18th of June Clinton had evacuated Philadelphia, crossed

the Delaware, and commenced his retreat through the Jerseys, which was one of the very few strategetical operations of the British commanders that has been at all admired. From Sandy Hook, by the aid of the ships which had come round the day before, the troops were conveyed to New York. Two days afterwards the Toulon fleet, under Admiral D'Estaing, arrived on the coast; and shortly afterwards appeared in view of the British fleet at Sandy Hook. Had it but reached New York a few days earlier, while Admiral Lord Howe was engaged in transporting the army, his naval armament might have been completely destroyed, and Clinton compelled to surrender after the manner of Burgoyne. D'Estaing's force being almost double that of Howe, it seemed that he was about to force the strait, and the English made every preparation for the most desperate resistance; but though he was not equal to such a bold stroke, the spectacle of an English fleet blockaded in their own harbours by a French squadron was sufficiently humiliating.

D'Estaing soon took his departure. The opportunity was thus given for a naval reinforcement, commanded by Admiral Byron, to join Lord Howe. Byron's proverbial ill luck in meeting with bad weather, which acquired for him among sailors the nickname of Foul Weather Jack, was maintained in this voyage; his ships had been shattered and dispersed by storms, and arrived one after the other, in an almost sinking condition. If D'Estaing had continued off Sandy Hook, many of them must have fallen into his hands under the eye of Lord Howe.

But D'Estaing had gone to co-operate with an American army for the reduction of Rhode Island. Thither

Howe, on being reinforced, also made his way. The day after his appearance the French Admiral again put to sea; and much manœuvring, according to the approved naval tactics of the age, took place between the two commanders for the weather-gauge. Lord Howe had determined to fight, even without this advantage, when a violent storm arose, and the angry combatants were separated and injured by the not less destructive fury of the elements. D'Estaing returned to Rhode Island, and then, his ships being much damaged, sailed to Boston. Howe was soon again ready for sea, and following D'Estaing, blockaded him at Boston, much as he had himself been blockaded by the French Admiral at Sandy Hook. This change of circumstances was certainly not very complimentary to the abilities of D'Estaing. He was becoming almost as obnoxious to his new republican allies as to his old national enemies. Deprived of the co-operation of the French fleet, on which they had much relied, the Americans were compelled, with heavy loss, to abandon their attempt against Rhode Island. Much soreness was produced in their hearts by what they regarded as the desertion of the French Commander. Most serious riots broke out between the French sailors and the American populace in the streets of Boston; and though these disturbances were, by the common consent of the American and French authorities, laid to the account of some treacherous British seamen, the result of the first joint expedition did not promise much for the stability of the alliance between the stars and stripes of the United States and the white flag of the House of Bourbon.

D'Estaing began to show some indications of seeking exclusively French objects. He issued a declaration,

calling on the Canadians to be ready to assist the allies, reminding them of their old attachments to the French monarchy, and making many vague promises of future reward. Shortly afterwards, with his fleet cleaned, victualled, and repaired, he set sail for the West Indies, to make conquests of British sugar islands, in which the Americans in arms seemed to have but little interest.

The war in that part of the world had also begun. Both the West India planters and the English Opposition had frequently remonstrated with the Government on the defenceless condition in which these valuable possessions were left. Their warnings were soon justified. As soon as he heard of the breaking out of hostilities, the Governor-General of Martinique landed in Dominica with two thousand men, and there being no adequate force to oppose him, summarily compelled it to return once more under French dominion. To make the matter worse, Admiral Barrington, with an English squadron fully sufficient to have protected the island, had been long, in obedience to his instructions, waiting for orders from the Government at Barbadoes, and France had at the time not a single line-of-battle ship in those tropical seas.*

The news of the loss of Dominica reached England in November, just before the meeting of Parliament. To the remonstrances and entreaties of the West Indian merchants, the First Lord of the Admiralty could only answer, that the war having come home to our own shores, they must first be protected; and until this could be done, the more distant dependencies must be left to their fate. Deep and angry murmurs came from many of the habitual supporters of the Ministry. Nearly all

* Annual Register, 1779, p. 38.

the distinguished military and naval officers hitherto employed in the American war, had returned home, and, as Members of Parliament, were supposed to be far from satisfied with the Government. The Commissioners of Peace were again in England, after their most unsatisfactory expedition, during which they were reported not to have been on the best of terms with the Commanders of the Royal army. Such unusual circumstances excited great interest, and the Opposition hoped much from the recriminations of Officers, Commissioners, and Cabinet Ministers.

These expectations were not disappointed. The Howes, as well as Burgoyne, blamed the Government for the manner in which hostilities were carried on, and the Royal Commissioners were much censured for their last most extraordinary proclamation, in which, instead of acting as agents for negotiating a peace, they finished their diplomatic career in America, by threatening a still more sanguinary war. This manifesto appeared in one of the morning papers soon after the session began. Motions were made and carried for laying it before both Houses. The Marquis of Rockingham in the Lords, and Mr. Coke, Member for Norfolk, in the Commons, moved Addresses which proposed to recommend His Majesty to disavow the violent denunciations of the Commissioners. In the House of Commons, Lord George Germaine, as the Minister for America, was directly assailed by General Howe, the late Commander-in-Chief on that continent; and dissension in the Ministerial ranks was obviously increasing. Burke, who had not hitherto opened his lips since the beginning of the session, commented finely on such unguarded expressions as “the extremes of war and the desolation of a country,” which the pro-

clamation contained. These threats, he said, were sweet sounding mutes and liquids, but their meaning was terrible. They meant, the killing of men, women, and children ; the burning of their houses ; the ravaging of their lands ; and carrying on war after the fashion of the Cherokees and savages of Onondago. And against whom was this vengeance denounced ? Against men who, full of conscious rectitude, were doing what they believed to be their duty ; against men who were standing up in the face of day, to fight for freedom and their country. Would not every power shrink from allying with a nation that had thrown away even the shadow of principle, and ventured to recall into the world all the forgotten cruelties of barbarous ages, and all the horrors of uncivilized war ? *

Ashamed of their attempt at intimidation, the Ministers endeavoured to explain the language away. But Governor Johnstone, smarting under the treatment he had received from the Americans, forgot all his old principles, and declared that no punishment could be too great, that no system of war could be too cruel, that no machines could be too infernal, to be employed against the patriots whose names he had, at the outset of the commission, affirmed that he went to America to teach his children to revere.

This sudden change of opinion was frequently reprehended by Burke. Jenkinson had succeeded Lord Barrington as Secretary-at-War, and appeared a very great, a very grave, and a very taciturn minister, invested with mysterious attributes, as the secret and confidential adviser of the Sovereign, and with an authority considered far above that of Lord North. He brought forward very

* Parl. Hist., vol. xix. p. 1399.

large army estimates, and made a most magnificent parade of the military strength of the country. Nothing could be further from his mind than any notion of submission. Nothing, too, could be further from that of Governor Johnstone, who, regardless of his inconsistency, outdid even Jenkinson, and his echo, Welbore Ellis, in boasting of the resources of the empire, declaiming against the American rebels, and asserting that a large majority of the Colonists were really opposed to the war, and dissatisfied with the Congress. Burke, in reply to Ellis and Johnstone, maintained that the acknowledgement of the independence of America was not a matter of choice, but of necessity. When he first heard that the States had claimed their independence, the intelligence made him sick at heart, it struck him to the soul; for he saw that it was a claim of which Great Britain could never rid herself: never! never! never! He was far indeed from wishing for this independence. But when a gamester had wrongly played his cards, and had lost much, it was necessary to make the most of the game, and to take care that he did not lose more. This was our case. We had already lost a large stake. But the existence of the empire was still greater; and yet this the Secretary-at-War, and his followers of the Court, were madly putting to the risk. Their argument was, in other words, “I have lost my Lincolnshire estate; I have lost my coal-mines in Northumberland, and my tin-mines in Cornwall; but I have still left a goose-common and a duck-decoy—and I have great magnanimity!” He asked Governor Johnstone why, if as he asserted, England had thirty thousand friends in Philadelphia, when they were backed with an army of eighteen thousand men, they did not disavow

that Congress whose tyranny was represented to be so oppressive? If the Colonists were divided into factions; if even in Massachusetts Bay, the French alliance had produced so much disgust; if so large a proportion of the American people were in their hearts still loyal to Great Britain, surely the Commission of Peace, with terms so ample and so humiliating, ought to have been a little more successful. He contrasted the condition of England and France, and the monetary operations of Lord North with those of Necker, who had become Controller-General of the French finances. He stigmatized as foolish weakness the reproaches so constantly in the mouths of the courtiers against the United States; for seeking the support of France. He showed from the history, and especially from the circumstance of the rise of the Dutch republic under the tutelary shield of England, that revolted subjects would at all times naturally seek the alliance of the power most hostile to the parent state. And he concluded with urging Ministers, since they must fight, to attack France with all their force; to vote men and enrol them in still greater numbers; but to employ them anywhere rather than in America.*

These were his opinions on the general policy of the war, at the close of the year 1778. But the great question of general policy was not then the prominent topic of political discussion. A question of an exciting personal nature, and in which his feelings both of private friendship and of political partisanship were deeply interested, became the leading subject of debate in the House of Commons, and of eager controversy out of doors.

The Ministerial prints, even while Keppel was at sea,

* *Collected Speeches*, vol. i. p. 410. *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xx. p. 81.

during the autumn, had contained many high eulogiums on Sir Hugh Palliser. These praises being thought to reflect invidiously on the Commander-in-Chief, the day before the return of the fleet to port, in November a letter from an officer was published in the *Morning Intelligencer*, stating, that the signal to form a line of battle in the Admiral's wake was flying from three o'clock in the afternoon until eight in the evening; that a direct message had been sent to Sir Hugh, and, like the signal, not obeyed; and that, in fact, it was this disobedience of orders which had prevented the battle from being renewed that day, and had rendered it easy for the French to escape. It is but justice to add, that these statements were afterwards in a great measure established by evidence; and that Captain John Jervis, afterwards the celebrated Earl St. Vincent, who commanded a ship in Keppel's division during the engagement, and whose authority it is not possible to treat lightly, had privately expressed the same discontent with Palliser's conduct.

Sir Hugh wrote a letter, which he demanded Keppel to sign, contradicting the fact that there was any intention of again fighting on the afternoon of the indecisive battle. Keppel returned no answer to this communication. Palliser called upon him, and, in a warm interview, hinted that, in justifying himself, he might be obliged to reflect on the Commander-in-Chief. On the first day of the session Lord Bristol, in the House of Lords, strongly pressed for an inquiry into Sir Hugh Palliser's conduct, which, however, Lord Sandwich refused to allow, on the ground that, when unanimity was never so necessary, it might split up the navy into factions. When the navy estimates were brought forward

in the Commons, the subject was warmly renewed, and notice was given for an immediate motion for a Committee of Inquiry. A week passed away before this business could be discussed. In the interval, Sir Hugh Palliser, to exculpate himself, made five charges against Keppel for misconduct on the 27th of July; and, on the same day, his colleagues in the Admiralty, without any further deliberation, informed the Commander-in-Chief to prepare for an immediate trial by court-martial.

The day after Keppel received this intimation from the Secretary of the Admiralty, Mr. Luttrell moved for the Committee on Sir Hugh Palliser. Keppel rose and stated, that it was himself, instead of Sir Hugh, that the Admiralty had ordered to be put on trial. At this announcement indignation and astonishment pervaded the whole assembly. Keppel, who had hitherto been so little able to speak in public that he was accustomed to read his speeches, now, stimulated by a strong feeling of injustice, spoke with so much spirit and animation that,—as Lord John Cavendish informed Lord Rockingham's sister, the Lady Charlotte Wentworth,—he suddenly appeared to become as eloquent as their friend Mr. Burke.* Every sentence was cheered from all sides of the House. After declining to vote on the question, and thanking God that he was the accused and not the accuser, Keppel took his departure, escorted by a large number of Members. Sir Hugh was almost universally condemned to his face; not one of his colleagues of the Admiralty said one word in his defence; and the Ministers, without venturing, against the general feeling of the House, to blame Keppel, only asserted, that when a charge was formally made by one distinguished officer

* *Memoirs of the Marquis of Rockingham*, vol. ii. p. 366.

against another, the Admiralty had no alternative but to put the accused on his trial.

This Burke denied. He contended that there was and must reside in the Navy Board a discretionary power, which rendered them responsible for all such orders, or that any officer might, to screen himself, do the most serious injury to the public service by bringing charges against his superior. Sir Joseph Mawbey went further, and stoutly affirmed, that the whole proceeding had every appearance of being a preconcerted scheme, on the part of Lord Sandwich and his colleagues, to ruin the Admiral, who was known to disapprove of their politics. One of the officials called him to order, on the plea that no Member had a right to make criminal accusations without proof; but he was himself called to order by Burke, who supported Sir Joseph, maintaining, that his remarks were understood to be only presumptions, and that presumption was at all times justifiable in argument.* The general opinion was, that this presumption was not far from the truth. Unfortunately there was nothing in Lord Sandwich's character to render the imputation improbable. After sitting silent through the storm of indignation which burst upon him from all quarters, Palliser was compelled again to rise, and solemnly to assert, upon his honour, that the charges he had, after five months' silence, laid against his friend and Commander-in-Chief, had not been concerted with any individual.

Burke spoke again, and eloquently defended Keppel. Was this the return, he asked, that the Admiral was to meet with after forty years of painful and laborious service, and after being in ten capital engagements or important conflicts, in every one of which he had,

* Parl. Hist. vol. xx. p. 64.

either as possessed of the sole command or acting in a subordinate character, acquitted himself with the highest honour and reputation? Was it an adequate return for a person of his rank and consequence, standing forth in a moment of such difficulty and danger as the favourite and chosen champion of his country?* Burke entered into a circumstantial detail of the naval engagement off Ushant, and showed that the account given in the French Gazette was a heap of contradictions and absurdities. He resumed his argument on the discretionary power he had before maintained to exist in the Board of Admiralty, and placed the matter so clearly before the House, that even the Attorney-General, Wedderburne, in replying for the Government, was obliged to acknowledge the force of Burke's observations. Wedderburne was answered by Dunning. But though a memorial, signed by twelve Admirals, with old Sir Edward Hawke at their head, was presented to the King, and though a cry of indignation rose throughout the whole navy, and rapidly spread from London throughout the country, arrangements were at once made for carrying out the trial. As Keppel's health was so very bad that, even on the day when he left the House of Commons with so much spirit, he had been seized with the most excruciating pains on reaching home, and it had taken half an hour to get him from the ground-floor up to his dining-room, his friend, Admiral Pigot, just before the Christmas recess, brought in a Bill authorizing the Admiralty to hold the court-martial on shore. The Bill was received with acclamation, and rapidly passed through both Houses, with only one solitary growl from the Lord Chancellor Thurlow.

* *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xx. p. 67.

During the Christmas week, the impending court-martial was the constant subject of conversation in the quiet domestic circle at Beaconsfield. Had Burke himself been about to be tried, the result could not have given him more anxiety. He made the Admiral's cause his own. He resolved to accompany him and his friends to Portsmouth, and stand by the gallant officer's side through all the harassing hours of this sad investigation. Whatever the consequences might be, he would remain with Keppel to the last. Young Richard Burke, who had left Oxford, and had commenced keeping his terms in the Inns of Court as a student of law, went with his father to Portsmouth, and on this occasion gained his first experience of the arduous labours which the ardent politician must undergo, and the fierce enmities which it is sometimes his duty to provoke and to defy.

The court-martial began on the 7th of January. On that day the Marquis of Rockingham, the Duke of Richmond, Lord John Cavendish, and several other distinguished members of the party, appeared with Burke and his son, to afford the gallant Admiral their powerful countenance. Lord Shelburne had sent Mr. Dunning to give Keppel the benefit of his legal advice; John Lee, too, co-operated, on the part of the Rockinghams; but the arrangement of the defence was more particularly entrusted to a young advocate, the Honourable Thomas Erskine, who, having served both in the naval and military professions, had recently been called to the Bar, and had forced himself into notice some six weeks before by the eloquence with which he had defended the Lieutenant-Governor of Greenwich Hospital in an action for libel. Richard Brinsley Sheridan, in full repute as a wit, dramatist, and theatrical manager, was also there, and gave

a public testimony of his political sympathies, though he had no opportunity of indicating those splendid but most artificial qualities of oratory with which he was, in his own estimation, and that of some other persons, to become the rival of Burke himself.

The case for the prosecution was not over until two days before the end of the month. It was however soon evident that it had completely broken down. Many of the witnesses brought forward by Sir Hugh Palliser to substantiate his charges, were compelled, on cross-examination, to give the fullest testimony to the abilities and the zeal with which Keppel had attempted to destroy the French fleet. The most disingenuous artifices appeared in many instances to have been resorted to, in order to bear out the accusations. Even the log-books of some of the ships, and particularly of that which carried Palliser's own flag, were found to have been altered and mutilated. Sir Hugh, standing in the most invidious of all positions, was repeatedly snubbed by the Court, which very unequivocally showed to what side the scale of justice was inclining. Keppel read a most impressive and pathetic speech in his defence, which triumphantly disposed of the charges of his accuser, and which, though written by Erskine, and transcribed by Captain John Jervis, shows in some of its best passages unmistakable marks of Burke's fine Roman hand. Day after day, with young Richard at his side, he took his seat in the Court, listened carefully to every interrogation, and weighed deliberately every point of the evidence. The manner of manœuvring fleets; the different signals for chasing and fighting; the advantages of the weather-gauge; the possibilities of a skilful enemy avoiding an engagement; the time required for vessels sailing on opposite tacks

to wear round, refit, and renew a battle ; the duty of inferior officers obeying the Commander-in-Chief, and every other nautical question which arose in the course of the trial, were entered into and studied by Burke with all the ardour of a professional seaman. He might be seen at the ear of Keppel, whispering words of encouragement, and ready with every suggestion that the circumstances required. He might be seen among the grey-headed and weather-beaten officers of the Seven Years' War, lending an attentive ear to their criticism of the last great naval battle, and with a glistening eye sharing their emotions as they gave vent to honest indignation at the treatment which the brave Admiral had met with from Lord Sandwich and his Board of Admiralty. And on the 11th of February, when the five charges were unanimously pronounced ill-founded and malicious, and Keppel's sword was returned to him in open Court, Burke's voice united in the loud shout of acclamation which the Duke of Cumberland began, and in which the poorest sailor of the forecastle heartily joined with tears rolling down the cheek and exultation on the brow.

It was then that, deeply sensible of all Burke's exertions during the trial, Keppel begged him to accept his portrait by their friend Sir Joshua Reynolds. The delineations of Keppel were, indeed, among the finest the great English artist ever executed, and one of them was also memorable as the first of his great portraits which brought Reynolds fully into public notice. Instead of representing Keppel in the formal manner that had been followed almost universally until that time, Reynolds depicted his naval patron as just escaped from shipwreck on the French coast, which thus showed, along

with the sailor's likeness, a remarkable incident of his earlier career, when, on ardently pursuing an enemy's ship, a bad pilot caused him to run aground.

The picture presented to Burke was of a later date, but was a not less accurate portrait. He has commemorated this gift in language which even vies with the richest colours of the painter, and which will live long after the brave Admiral's features shall have been obliterated from the perishable canvas on which they were so lovingly portrayed by the grateful and affectionate Sir Joshua. Few who have read those splendid paragraphs at the conclusion of the Letter to a Noble Lord, have regarded the allusions to Keppel and his portrait as anything more than a dexterous artifice of the most brilliant of rhetoricians. Yet how unjustly they have been so regarded, a letter which Burke wrote to Keppel on being informed, during this year, that the picture had been at last sent to his house in town, fully evinces. All the emotions which the old man so eloquently recalled seventeen years afterwards, it appears that he actually experienced on receiving the portrait. "The town, and my house there," observed Burke, "will be the more pleasant to me for a piece of furniture I have had since I saw you, and which I owe to your goodness. I shall leave to my son, who is of a frame of mind to relish that kind of honour, the satisfaction of knowing that his father was distinguished by the partiality of one of those who are the marked men of all story, by being the glory and the reproach of the times they live in, and whose services and merits, by being above recompense, are delivered over to ingratitude. Whenever he sees that picture, he will remember what Englishmen and what English seamen were, in the days

when the name of that nation and when eminence and superiority in that profession were one and the same thing. Indeed, I am perfectly convinced that 'Englishman' and 'Seaman' are names that must live and die together. Perhaps the last honour which the naval soldiery of this nation may be permitted to do themselves and their country is, the justice they have done to you. This has sealed their reputation. It will be recorded with the rest, when people read of the people who have successively held the empire of the sea. I assure you, my dear Sir, that though I possess the portraits of friends highly honoured by me, and very dear to me on all accounts, yours stands alone; and I intend that it should so continue, to mark the impression I have received of this most flattering mark of your friendship."*

The future of this son, to whom Burke so affectingly alludes, had become his most cherished dream. He fondly watched every indication of virtue and ability in young Richard, and considered that in all respects he fully justified the most ardent expectations. The manner in which the young man had, during the trial at Portsmouth, espoused Keppel's cause, and the devotion he had shown to all his father's friends, increased, if anything could increase, the love, admiration, and hope, with which Burke regarded that only child who was, as he thought, to perpetuate his house, his name, his genius, and his character. Little appreciated and understood as he had been by his contemporaries, the anxious father already saw with delight that he was appreciated and understood by his beloved son. This comfort he at least had. The past had been most toilsome, the present was but little cheering, but the future was boundless and resplendent. He

* Burke to Keppel: *Life of Keppel*, vol. ii. p. 260.

would be the founder of a family at Beaconsfield, of which his mighty genius and disinterested political career would be the proudest inheritance. He would see his son all that he himself had striven to be, and a distant posterity would rejoice in the fame and in the virtues of their illustrious ancestor. No clouds as yet overcast a prospect at once so soothing and so inspiring. While the hour is, the father enjoys his enchanting vision to the full. Happy in Richard, and happy in Keppel's triumph over the malice of his accusers, Burke left Portsmouth to return to his parliamentary duties at Westminster.

During his absence at Portsmouth, all England had sustained a loss. In that loss too he had no ordinary share. On the 20th of January, his old friend Garrick had expired. The body had lain in state. There had been a splendid funeral to the Abbey. The presence of the great actor was, at Burke's return to town, gone from those social parties of which he had long been the gayest ornament. Burke has generally been represented as one of the mourners at the funeral; and the very words have been quoted which he is supposed to have said at the ceremony, as he beheld Shakespeare's statue overlooking Garrick's grave.* Had he been in town, there can be no doubt that he would have been one of the pall-bearers who accompanied the remains to their last resting-place. But in no authentic list of the mourners will his name be found; and an attention to dates may show that his attendance at the funeral was simply impossible. Though he doubtless regretted as much as any one the death of Garrick, yet he was himself at that very time too anxiously engaged in watching the preparation of Keppel's defence, to leave Portsmouth and make

* Prior.

one in the procession to Westminster Abbey. This was an occasion when even Cicero would have admitted, that in the conflicting duties of friendship, the mere outward testimony of respect for the dead ought to be sacrificed to the dearest interests of the living.

Burke found London in a most excited state. The intense hatred of injustice and equally intense love of fair play which are so deeply rooted in the hearts of the English people were fully roused by the Admiral's trial. Never since the acquittal of the Bishops in the reign of James II. was there a more general and enthusiastic manifestation of joy, than when the result of the court-martial became known in the metropolis. Night after night the streets were one blaze of illumination. Sir Hugh Palliser's furniture was destroyed, and himself burnt in effigy on Tower-hill. The huge iron gates of the Admiralty were torn from their hinges. Nor were these excesses committed only by the humbler classes of society: for taking an active part in one of these disturbances, the Duke of Ancaster spent a night in the watch-house; and a lady distinctly saw young William Pitt busily engaged in smashing her windows.*

The two Houses of Parliament were not behind public opinion in rendering ample justice to the injured Admiral. The day after the acquittal, Barré moved and Sir George Savile seconded the Thanks of the House of Commons to Keppel for his conduct on the 27th and 28th of June. The motion was carried by acclamation. No Ministerial influence could prevent the House of Lords from coming to a corresponding vote. A large party of noblemen gave Keppel a dinner at the Thatched House Tavern. The City presented him her freedom

* Brenton's *Life of Earl St. Vincent*, vol. i. p. 24.

in a box of heart-of-oak richly ornamented with gold, and the most distinguished provincial towns followed the example.

In proportion to these overpowering testimonies of public applause, was the humiliation of his accusers. As soon as Burke rejoined Fox on the benches of the Opposition, the conduct of Lord Sandwich and the Admiralty in instituting such a prosecution, justly became the subject of their keenest animadversion. Sir Hugh Palliser bowed to the storm of obloquy, by resigning all his employments under the Crown, except that of Vice-Admiral, which allowed him to be tried by court-martial; and, without Keppel's sanction, a proceeding of this nature was carried on against Palliser, evidently to shelter him under a sentence of acquittal, from charges which his superior officer had not thought it his duty to make. This in some manner was the effect. But however unjustifiable Sir Hugh's conduct was, Lord Sandwich's had undoubtedly been still more reprehensible: nothing was too bad to be believed of him, and the worst could scarcely be worse than the truth. Against him therefore the two Opposition leaders, throughout the remaining portion of the session, directed one continued fire of censorial motions and eloquent invectives. The result of some of these discussions showed so clearly the Ministry was losing ground, that even Lord North's equanimity was disturbed, and he broke out into a furious passion. A motion condemning the Admiralty for sending Keppel to sea in June with twenty ships to meet a French fleet of thirty-two, was only rejected on a division by a majority of thirty-four; and Ministerial expresses were sent far and wide, summoning reluctant Members to the rescue of a tottering Government.

The most honest country gentlemen were becoming scrupulous. It was not surely without reason, in the spring of 1779, that, Tories and High Churchmen as they were, they began to hesitate in their allegiance to a Ministry which had reduced a great, united, and victorious empire, into such a humiliating, disgraceful, and appalling condition. Not even when the Dutch fleet domineered in the Channel, not even when the corrupt and recreant Ministers of Charles II. talked of abandoning the Tower to an invading enemy, and when the cannon of a hostile armament at Tilbury Fort for once reverberated in the ears of the Londoners, was the nation menaced with such impending dangers. England was approaching the most terrible crisis through which she has ever passed. The time was near when, unsuccessfully contending with her Colonies in America, she was also to be at war with the combined powers of the House of Bourbon, and threatened by the armed neutrality of the Baltic; when her fleets were to retire before the navies of France and Spain; when she was to be insulted on her own coasts, and to depend for safety on the merest accidents of the hour.

But this was not the worst. On the first day of the session, Lord Sandwich had declined to allow an inquiry into Sir Hugh Palliser's conduct, under the pretence that it would cause dissensions in the navy at a time when unanimity was so imperiously requisite. Yet, a few days afterwards, he had, to shield Palliser, placed the Commander-in-Chief himself on his trial; and thus had directly and inevitably produced all the evils he professed to deprecate. The British navy was from that time divided into two factions, that refused to go to sea with, or even to speak to, each other. Finding that the

Admiralty still continued the same reserved treatment of him which they had begun during the last summer, and that the King received his representations very coldly, Keppel, with characteristic spirit, threw up his command. Some courtly writers have regretted that, at such a time, he should have refused to continue to his country those services which she never so much needed. Yet surely such a consideration ought to have been present with the Government when they put him on his trial for his life, and for that honour which was dearer to him than his life. It was not owing to Lord Sandwich and the Board of Admiralty that Keppel, instead of once more being in a position to hoist his flag on board *The Victory*, had not been, like Byng, shot on the quarter-deck. Keppel's resignation was followed by those of Sir Robert Harland and Lord Howe. In this terrible emergency, the best naval officers of the country refused to serve with a man like Lord Sandwich at the head of the Admiralty. It was with difficulty that a valetudinarian Admiral, Sir Charles Hardy, who had been something in his day, but whose day had been long past, could be found to command the Channel fleet against such a host of enemies as English sailors had never yet encountered; and when they had to retreat up Channel before their enemies, they had reason to curse that imbecile and dishonest Government which had prevented them from once more fighting, with some hopes of victory, under Black Dick Howe, and Little Keppel.

CHAPTER XXVII.

1779-1780.

AT THE HOUR OF ENGLAND'S NECESSITY AND OF
IRELAND'S OPPORTUNITY.

THE gloom thickened round the British Islands. Threatened by such a combination of foes as the civilized world had never before seen, the dissensions in the navy and in Parliament were not the only circumstances which prevented the country from meeting its enemies as one man. The sufferings of Ireland under the heavy burdens of the war, had daily increased. While she was groaning under very real oppressions, her sister, Scotland, burst out in a flame from imaginary grievances. The weakening influence of one of the most incapable Ministries that ever existed in England was painfully felt throughout every fibre of the political body; and while some parts of the system were smitten with discordant convulsions, others languished from want of tone.

The first subject which occupied Burke's attention, after his return from Keppel's trial at Portsmouth, was an inquiry into the means of commercial relief to his native country, proposed by Lord Newhaven. Her staple produce was, under an embargo, lying shut up in her warehouses. Her linen manufactories were standing still. In a time of profound peace her national debt and every other public burden had greatly increased, while

recently her exports had alarmingly diminished. The troops on her military establishment were sent to fight the battles of England in America ; and when, menaced by an invasion of the common enemy, she applied for means of defence to the Imperial authorities, she was told to defend herself, as the Government could afford her no protection. Ireland having to look to herself, amid her poverty and degradation a public spirit awoke, of which the English Ministers had little dreamed. Without commission from the Crown, without the sanction of any official authority, bands of armed volunteers were speedily enrolled. When Lord Newhaven first brought forward, on the fifteenth of February, the question of admitting Ireland to a general freedom of trade with all the British dominions, the patriotic associations for public defence had excited little attention and no apprehension. Members therefore assumed quite a high tone. Sir Thomas Egerton said, that if Ireland were allowed to import her own cotton, Manchester would certainly be ruined. Lord North, blind then as ever to the future, expressed his surprise that any more relief should be asked for Ireland ; affirmed that the commercial position of England ought to be the first consideration ; and was decidedly of the opinion that no further commercial privileges could be granted to Ireland without seriously injuring the trade of this kingdom. Burke followed Lord North in the debate, and with much keenness ridiculed the objections which had come from the Minister and his prejudiced supporters. On what ground, he asked, had the motion been opposed ? Why, truly, because, if one measure of relief were granted to Ireland, she might ask for another. Such a narrow and illiberal policy had lost thirteen colonies to England,

and, if it should be continued, would end in her absolute ruin.*

The previous question was carried ; but a compromise was effected. Lord North agreed to withdraw his opposition, if the friends of Ireland would confine their efforts to certain specific proposals. In consequence of this understanding, Lord Newhaven moved, on the tenth of March, for a committee to consider the propriety of allowing Ireland to import her own sugars from the Colonies. Lord North, affecting impartiality and indifference, was designedly absent ; and as the motion was fairly debated on its merits, it was very favourably received. The progress of the Bill was subsequently interrupted. The great trading towns of England and Scotland began again to grumble. Lord North came down to the House at the head of his official phalanx, and utterly regardless of his recent professions and of what effect his interposition might have in the critical circumstances of Ireland, succeeded, by a bare majority, in defeating the measure. Saying that he was not in his place by accident when the committee was first moved, the Minister added : “ As for serving Ireland in the manner suggested, I always have been, and always shall be, against it.”

At this declaration Burke was highly indignant. After a motion for an account of British exports to the West Indies had been withdrawn, he rose and vehemently denounced Lord North’s trifling with Ireland. Were there not already eleven thousand men in arms free from any kind of Ministerial control ? Without in any degree blaming the men who had taken the field to supply the deficiencies of the Government, did not such

* Parl. Hist., vol. xx. p. 137.

a state of things require the interference of the House of Commons? What did the Minister's influence produce everywhere? What was seen in his Government itself but eternal anarchy and confusion? Some of the most distinguished of the noble Lord's colleagues had earnestly supported this very Bill, which the Prime Minister declared had not, and never should have, his support. The Speaker at length stood up, and said that Burke could not continue his speech unless he intended concluding it with a motion. He moved that an inquiry should be made into the fact of there being now in Ireland a body of troops under arms unknown to Government. Having secured his object of delivering his thoughts on the dangerous state of Ireland, he at length sat down.*

Lord North was no prophet. Before the year ended, he had publicly to acknowledge the justice of the warnings Burke had given, and to contradict his own solemn declarations. He was to concede to an armed force what he refused to grant to Parliamentary reason, and himself to propose the very measure which he had just declared would always meet with his opposition. Burke was as systematic as Lord North was unsystematic. The more minutely his political life is examined, the more is it found to abound with instances of that steady consistency of principle and of action which even the most cynical criticism will not find it easy to dispute.

A Bill was brought in, extending to Protestant Dissenters and their schoolmasters, similar relief to that which Parliament had, during the last session, granted the Roman Catholics. It was of course supported by Burke, and not being opposed by the Government, was carried easily through the House. While it was in

* Parl. Hist., vol. xx. p. 270.

committee, however, Lord North presented a petition from the University of Oxford against it, unless a clause were inserted declaratory of the Christianity of those who would receive the benefit of the measure. He proposed such a clause. It was strongly objected to by Wilkes, Fox, Charles Turner, and Lord John Cavendish ; but on this occasion, as on the proposal to relieve the clergymen from subscribing to the Thirty-nine Articles, seven years before, Burke separated himself from his most intimate political friends, and voted in favour of the declaratory clause with Sir Roger Newdigate, Sir W. Bagot, and all the staunch Churchmen and Tory country gentlemen.*

But in the same month, as in the preceding period, he very unequivocally showed his devotion to the cause of religious freedom. Since the accession of George III. Scotland had been the most tranquil portion of his dominions. The discontents of a great Whig aristocracy, the violent persecutions of Wilkes, the most dangerous invasions of the Constitution in the Middlesex elections, the Stamp Act, the Tea Duty, the Boston Charter Act, the Prohibitory Bill, the employment of the savages against the Colonists, all the measures which had driven great provinces into rebellion, and produced the disgraces and misfortunes of the American war, had been regarded with singular equanimity by his Majesty's grateful subjects north of the Tweed. Seeing so many of their countrymen the especial favourites of the Sovereign, and advanced to high dignities in England, the old Jacobite prejudices of the Scotch had completely thawed, and their fervent loyalty to George III. had become not a little incompatible with any zeal for public

* Parl. Hist., vol. xx. p. 309.

liberty. Their Lord Advocate, Henry Dundas, had promised, after the passing of the English Roman Catholic Act of the last session, to follow it during that which was in progress by a similar measure in favour of the Roman Catholics of Scotland. This declaration kindled such a flame as no oppressive act of the Government could have awakened. An inflammatory pamphlet gave the signal of alarm. Resolutions were passed at public meetings. In Edinburgh a committee for the Protestant interest was formed. It soon had corresponding committees in other towns. Invectives against Popery were thundered from the pulpits. The press teemed with the most acrimonious accusations against all who professed the ancient creed. The old covenanting spirit was fully roused, and its features had certainly not improved during the long trance in which it had, since the Revolution, been permitted to fall, from the politic forbearance of tolerating Administrations. The populace attacked the houses of the Roman Catholics in Edinburgh, and of all who were believed to be in favour of religious freedom. Dr. Robertson's windows were broken, and his residence would have been demolished had it not been for a strong body of his friends who assembled in his defence. In Glasgow similar disturbances also broke out; but the magistrates there exerted themselves as energetically to maintain order, as in Edinburgh they were most criminally apathetic. The terrified Catholics had, at the first outburst of this outrageous spirit, voluntarily offered to give up the measure of relief they had been promised: their resolution to this effect had been communicated by the Scotch Members to Lord North, and a letter published in the newspapers showing that the design had been abandoned. But the fanatic

hatred of the Church of Rome, which so strongly characterizes the past history of the Scottish race, having been once more revived, was not easily induced again to slumber. The committee with such a high-sounding title was at first composed of some thirteen obscure individuals, of whom one was a goldsmith, another a teacher in an hospital, and the secretary himself only an apprentice; but their zeal giving them importance in their own eyes, as they beheld their association ramifying through Scotland, their ambition rose higher with success, and they began at length to correspond with a society for the same object in London, then equally as obscure as their own, and called the Protestant Association.* What consequences this communication of sentiments had in England, and especially in her great metropolis, were in the next year most unmistakably to appear.

Burke already showed himself keenly sensible of the danger of allowing ignorant fanaticism to control the actions of established authority. On the 18th of March he informed the House that he had a petition to present from the Roman Catholics of Scotland. Lord North, by His Majesty's commands, recommended it to the attention of the Commons. It recapitulated the hardships which the petitioners had recently endured in Edinburgh and Glasgow; gave serious instances of the contempt with which the House of Commons was treated by having its right to mitigate and repeal the penal laws absolutely denied; and in the most moderate and respectful manner it requested Parliament to find some compensation for the persons who had during the riots suffered losses which, from their humble circumstances,

* Annual Register, 1780, p. 33.

they were quite unable to bear. After this petition had been read, Burke moved that it should be referred to a committee. He made a highly indignant and animated speech from which, had the Government profited, the still more disgraceful occurrences of the following year would have been prevented. He indignantly commented on the absurd arguments which the committee for the Protestant interest had used against the Catholics, and scornfully denounced the inflammatory invectives contained in pamphlets published, as he had been informed, under the auspices of the Society in Scotland for the Diffusion of Christian Knowledge. He then strongly reprehended the Administration for its supineness ; but, as he was commenting on the apathy of the Executive, he looked in the direction of the Treasury bench, and beheld the Prime Minister enjoying as usual a peaceful slumber. “I hope,” continued Burke, “Government is not dead, but only asleep ;”—and, pointing to the unconscious First Lord of the Treasury, he exclaimed, “Brother Lazarus is not dead, but sleepeth !” At this, a general roar of laughter burst forth, which was as loud on the Ministerial side of the House as on that of the Opposition. In the midst of the explosion Lord North awoke, and, on being informed of the cause, laughed as heartily as any other Member.* Lord George Gordon, the head of the Association, declared that the Scotch Catholics were not entitled to the same indulgence as their English brethren in the faith ; and, by his gloomy declamation against idolaters, soon extinguished all emotions of mirth and pleasantry. Burke was ready to bring in a Bill to give effect to the request, with which he wished the House to comply ; but as Lord North ex-

* Parl. Hist., vol. xx. p. 327.

pressed himself in favour of voluntary compensation, and assured the House that he would see that this object should in some manner be attained, the previous question was carried, and the petition allowed to lie on the table.

Burke's speech on presenting this petition was imperfectly reported. The severe reprehension which it expressed of the Protestant Society in Scotland, and especially of the doctrines he supposed their pamphlets to have disseminated, caused considerable annoyance to some of those respectable but mischievous individuals. Two gentlemen, one a merchant and the other a Presbyterian clergyman, wrote to him from Edinburgh, complaining of the strictures he had passed upon their proceedings, and enclosing him a pamphlet and some sermons, that they thought much more moderate in their tone than another publication of which he had accused the Protestant Committee and their reverend supporters. They both professed themselves his admirers. The clergyman in particular informed him that he had fully embraced his principles respecting the American war. Burke replied to both these letters, and managed, as his manner of correspondence was, in the most polite and complimentary language, to rebuke both his correspondents for their intolerant conduct, and to read them, in a respectful tone, a very severe lesson. Mr. Patrick Bowie, the merchant, with his pamphlet, and the Rev. John Erskine, the clergyman, with his sermons, were very unfortunate in the writings they had sent for Burke's approval. He found them quite as inflammatory as the production he had held up to the indignation of the House of Commons; and anything rather than, as his two correspondents expected, distinguished for their

moderation. "Gentlemen," wrote Burke, "of your activity in public affairs, in which you have taken a voluntary part, ought rather to employ your abilities in enlightening than in inflaming the people. We have had disunion enough already, and I heartily wish that your part of the kingdom had manifested but one-half of the zeal for the union of our Protestant Empire on terms of equity and freedom, that has been manifested for taking away all justice and all liberty from our Roman Catholic subjects at home. If there had, we should not have been set down in our present miserable condition."*

Yet there were some accomplished gentlemen who gloried in the name of Whigs, as little favourable to the relaxation of the penal laws as these Scotch Presbyterians. At a later period of the session, Lord George Gordon more than once revived the subject of the petition of the Scotch Roman Catholics. He considered it a national disgrace that such a document should be allowed to remain on the table of the House of Commons, and surprised Members with his weeping, praying, and ranting. Burke always met the fury of this Protestant leader with his inimitable weapons of ridicule, eloquence, and wisdom. But Horace Walpole wrote to Conway, who had gone to defend his government of Jersey, that Burke was quite as frantic in favour of the Roman Catholics as Lord George Gordon was against them; and he classed the earnest efforts of the philosophic statesman in the cause of toleration, and those of the noble fanatic in the cause of persecution, together, as equally absurd.†

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 260.

† Walpole's Collected Letters, vol. vi. p. 51. Parliament. Hist., vol. xx. p. 831.

Burke's efforts to acquire a freedom of trade for his native country, had in many quarters met with as little appreciation. But the peculiar circumstances of Ireland at that time, accompanied with the indignation which had been occasioned by the refusal of the House of Commons to grant the small boon of importing her own sugars, were speedily driving matters to a solution. The army of volunteers was rapidly increasing. In some places resolutions against importing British manufactures, until justice had been done to Ireland, were enthusiastically passed; and though these combinations against the commerce of England had not as yet become general, they might justly alarm a sagacious statesman.

Lord Rockingham brought the whole question of Irish policy before the House of Lords. In a speech of two hours' length, full of information and wisdom, he laid bare the distresses of the country in which he was so deeply interested, pointed out the danger to England from the associations against her trade, backed as they were by a patriotic army over which the Ministers acknowledged they had no control; and earnestly advised their immediate attention to a business of which the evils would inevitably increase by neglect. The sting of the motion being taken out by the omission of all the implied censure, as a mere address for papers, it was agreed to; but, as Lord Gower, the Lord Privy Seal, who effected the compromise, afterwards confessed, and who, though unscrupulous enough, was really alarmed at the state of affairs, his Majesty's advisers never thought of giving the subject any prudent consideration. At the conclusion of a comprehensive speech on the Budget, Burke himself renewed the warnings he had already given. To Members of the Opposition the con-

dition of Ireland, indeed, appeared so portentous, that Mr. Thomas Townshend proposed to advise the King to defer the prorogation of Parliament. Burke also zealously supported this motion ; but it was overruled : and Ireland was left to her own resources, to achieve a most decisive, though bloodless revolution.

While Burke's mind was at the beginning of the summer so much occupied with the unusual appearances in his native country, he received a letter from his old friend, Shackleton. Richard's son Abraham had just been married and the father was about to resign to the young couple the school at Ballitore. He informed his illustrious friend of these circumstances, and, making many kind inquiries about young Richard, also expressed his hopes that, should this only son become, like his father, an active politician, he would not suffer himself to be an eager partisan ; and Shackleton gratified Burke with the intelligence that, as he intended for the future to come to the annual May meetings of the Society of Friends in London, they would have more frequent opportunities of seeing each other than they had had since the statesman left Ireland to seek his fortune in England, now all but thirty years ago.

Burke keenly reciprocated the kind feeling Richard evinced at this change in a humble but useful and conscientious life. After congratulating him on the prospect, he frankly confessed that he knew not how to wish his son other than he was, and made some quiet but very significant observations on his friend's allusions to parties. Shackleton's scruples on this head were, indeed, the common objections of good and respectable persons with but little knowledge of politics or of the world. The last time he visited London, he had spent some

time with Burke during a busy session. While he admitted that Edmund was as cordial as ever, honest Shackleton could not at all enter into the warmth of his political feelings, or appreciate the earnestness with which he resisted the progress of the American war. The quiet rural schoolmaster felt that he was in an atmosphere unsuited to his habits of life, and unfavourable to his spiritual constitution ; and therefore, though he admired, he was far from envying his brilliant friend, whose whole soul appeared engrossed in what appeared to Shackleton merely sublunary affairs.* But other pursuits besides politics, Burke now said, had their temptations and annoyances. “ So little satisfaction have I, that I should not hesitate a moment to retire from public business, if I were not in some doubt of the right a man has, that goes a certain length in those things ; and if it were not from an observation, that there are often obscure vexations and contests in the most private life, which may as effectually destroy a man’s peace as anything which may happen in public contentions.”†

Such thoughts were necessary to encourage an earnest Member of the Opposition to struggle on in the sad year 1779. Things grew worse and worse. The day after the rejection of Mr. Thomas Townshend’s motion

* “ I have been,” Shackleton then wrote to his wife, “ these two last nights at Edmund Burke’s, in Westminster. They have been very kind, and he is indeed an admirable man. . . . I thank Divine Providence that my relish (I hope prevailing, uppermost, permanent relish) is for other things. Indeed, the distraction occasioned in the mind by being of necessity occupied by two different objects, causes a disagreeable sensation in a spiritual constitution so weak as mine.”—Memoirs and Letters of Richard Shackleton, p. 76.

† Burke to Shackleton, May 25th, 1779 : Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 278.

to defer the prorogation of Parliament, it was rumoured that the Spanish Ambassador had presented a note from his Government to the British Ministers little short of a formal declaration of war. That afternoon Members rushed in great and unusual numbers to the House; and the appearance of Lord North was eagerly looked for, that they might at the first glance of his countenance see whether this most serious report were true. At length the Prime Minister entered, with a face suffused with smiles, and every feature beaming with delight. He seemed rather like a messenger of victory than the bearer of such tremendous tidings.* The comfort drawn from Lord North's looks was, however, soon dispelled. He informed the House that a Manifesto had been delivered to the King, and that he would bring it down with a Royal Message on the following day. Burke immediately sprang up, and lamenting the condition of the country, upbraided the Ministers for disregarding the warnings of the Opposition, and for constantly representing a rupture with Spain as an utter impossibility. "Ah, Sir," he exclaimed, in mournful tones, "what a long and dismal, what a dark, sad night has this session been,—and to leave us at the end of it, engaged in a war with both Powers of the House of Bourbon, and America joined with them against us!"

The Speaker, interrupting him, said he could not be permitted to continue his speech unless he had a motion to make. "Sir," Burke replied, "I could make a motion. The impeachment of the Minister," pointing to Lord North, "would be a very proper one." "Move!"

* See Speeches of Colonel Barré and Sir George Savile: Parl. Hist., vol. xx. pp. 898, etc.

move!" cried many Members. This indignant chorus was kept up for some time.

Burke was again about to continue his remarks, when he was suddenly interrupted by the Speaker. The whole House became in the greatest confusion. Some Members blamed the Speaker for calling Burke to order before he knew whether or not the orator intended concluding with a motion. "I, also, am for impeaching the Minister," said Charles Turner. Lord North observed, that any motion Mr. Burke had to make, would, in his opinion, be made with more propriety after the Royal Message had come down. Burke however then stated, that he had a motion to make: it was, that the House should immediately form itself into a Committee on the State of the Nation. "Before we talk," said he, "of carrying on a contest with America, and France, and Spain, let us know whether there are means sufficient remaining in the country; and let us know whether the present Ministers, who have hitherto shown themselves such masters both in diplomacy and arms, are fit to be entrusted with this additional war." The motion was seconded by Mr. Hartley, and produced a warm debate, in which Lord North was vehemently reprehended for his good looks in such a time of public calamity. Lord John Cavendish entreated Burke to withdraw his motion, as he was against having any question brought before the House until the Ministers were brought to condign punishment. Baker and Turner threatened to stop the supplies.*

On the next day the Message and a copy of the Spanish Note were communicated to the two Houses. The Ministers of his Most Catholic Majesty proved

* Parl. Hist., vol. xx. pp. 896-899.

themselves great arithmeticians; for, in addition to having had their offers of mediation insidiously received, they computed the grievances which Spain had lately suffered from Great Britain to amount in number to exactly one hundred. This Manifesto of the Spanish Ministers was a strange, rambling document, but it showed logically enough that they considered this to be a good opportunity for joining France and America; and England could do nothing, but with her characteristic resolution confront sullenly her increasing host of foes.

The Address, in an Answer to the Royal Message, was carried without a dissentient. Lord John Cavendish then moved another, praying His Majesty to collect and dispose of his forces so as to exert the whole strength of the Empire exclusively against the House of Bourbon. This motion, though in truth most judicious and statesmanlike, being equivalent to an abandonment of the war against the Colonies, was opposed by the Ministers. Burke spoke energetically in its support. He said that it was impossible to carry on successfully a war against France and Spain in Europe, and also at the same time a war in America; and that, the British dominions in Europe being now at stake, it was in Europe alone the British forces ought wisely to be employed.* Other counsels were, however, fated to prevail, and the motion was rejected by a large majority.

As war with Spain had been long expected, it seemed that the first object of the English Ministry must be, by blocking up the French in the harbour of Brest, to prevent the union of the two fleets of the Bourbon Powers. This most obvious duty was performed like all that the Government undertook. D'Orvilliers was allowed to get

* *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xx. p. 900.

the start of Sir Charles Hardy, and to sail unmolested to the Spanish coast. A remonstrance against this gross negligence was the last act of Burke in the House of Commons, before Parliament was prorogued in July. He called it the most recent and the worst blunder of the Ministry; and the indignity to which England was immediately exposed, fully justified his parting indignation.*

The flags of France and Spain soon waved side by side. Their combined fleets, amounting to between sixty and seventy line-of-battle ships, hastened to the unprotected British shores, whence a Royal Proclamation commanded all cattle and horses to be driven inland at the approach of the invaders. They paraded in triumph three days before Plymouth. Nor was this the most humiliating spectacle that the inhabitants on the coasts of Sussex and Devonshire were destined to behold during this terrible summer. On the last day of August they saw, with bitter mortification, the British Admiral and his fleet running up the Channel, chased by their enemies. The immediate danger, however, passed away. Fortune was more propitious to England than the wisdom of her rulers deserved; dissensions broke out between the French and Spanish Admirals; and, without having done anything more than vainly manifest that England no longer maintained her cherished dominion of the seas, early in September they left the British coasts, and returned, in very bad humour, to their own ports.

This mighty cloud had scarcely passed away without bursting, when, in another quarter of the heavens, arose a new danger, less formidable indeed, but not less mortifying to the pride of a great and high-spirited nation. An

* Parl. Hist., vol. xx. p. 922.

adventurer of Scottish birth, called Paul Jones, had in the last year set fire to the shipping at Whitehaven and carried off some guns from the forts. He afterwards gratified a private animosity by landing near Glasgow, and pillaging the house of a gentleman to whom his father was said to have been a gardener. Paul Jones appeared, this September, off the mouth of the Humber, and menaced Hull. There was great alarm throughout Yorkshire. Lord Rockingham, at the head of the gentlemen of the county, hurried to the endangered town; and though the cannon of the fort were worth nothing more than old iron, and though the Mayor and Aldermen, as is usual with these civic functionaries in a great emergency, were in a state of helpless bewilderment, he endeavoured to concert with them some measures of defence.* They were a little comforted on learning that the Baltic Fleet had been seen off the coast, convoyed by the Serapis, a ship of forty guns, and the Scarborough, of twenty. The news of the evening sadly disappointed their expectations of the morning. Instead of the Serapis beating Paul Jones and his four vessels, after a desperate engagement, Paul Jones took both the Serapis and her companion. Leaving the Yorkshire coast with his prizes, he triumphantly carried them to Holland, and then appeared in the Firth of Forth, threatening Edinburgh with three small brigs, all of which together could scarcely have withstood a single broadside from a first-rate man-of-war. This had at length been the consequence of maintaining, against Burke's prescient eloquence, the duty of threepence a pound on tea, which Lord North, his sagacious colleagues, and their Royal Master, had considered bound up with the dignity of

* Rockingham Memoirs and Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 382.

the Imperial authority ! Insulted on her own coasts, defeated on her own seas by renegade adventurers,—her own children,—was this really the same England that had, in her early youth, vanquished Armadas, and colonized new worlds ; that had but yesterday conquered the empire of the Moguls, and given the law to both Powers of the House of Bourbon ? Never in the annals of mankind had Burke's saying been more speedily and amply illustrated, that in those who undertook to govern, want of wisdom was a crime.*

In the West Indies the losses of England were more serious. Byron was there opposed to D'Estaing. Their forces were about equal. As a valuable West Indian fleet would, without the protection of an adequate armament, be exposed to capture by a French reinforcement which was daily expected to arrive, the English Admiral unwiseley determined to convoy it part of the way home. The first effect of his absence was that the Island of St. Vincent was taken by a small expedition from Martinique, without a single shot having been fired. When joined by his expected reinforcement, D'Estaing appeared before Grenada, and, after a sharp conflict, compelled this island also to surrender. On returning to St. Lucia, the British Admiral first learned that St. Vincent was lost and that Grenada was attacked ; but knowing nothing of the surrender, or of the increase in the strength of the French fleet, he resolved to attempt the relief of that valuable possession. At daybreak, on the sixth of July, the two fleets came in sight of each other. Though the French endeavoured to avoid coming to close quarters, a fierce engagement was begun, and more than once renewed in the course of the day. Never was the valour of the

* Cavendish Debates.

British seamen more signally displayed; never was it exerted in a more hopeless cause. It was only after some of their ships had made their way, through smoke and fire, to the mouth of St. George's Harbour, that, on seeing the French flag floating on the fort, they discovered that the island had surrendered, and that therefore even victory could not snatch from the hands of the enemy the prize for which they were so gallantly contending. Thus, with no reproach to the gallant Admiral at the head of the British fleet, was fought another of those indecisive actions against an unwilling enemy, of which the American war had already afforded more than one illustrious example. His ships were much damaged. As D'Estaing was so much superior in strength, the French became, for the time, the undisputed masters in those seas. A general panic spread throughout the British possessions, which, with other circumstances, might have been attended with the most fatal consequences, had not D'Estaing thought it necessary to sail to the succour of the Americans in the southern provinces.

There a faint and fitful gleam of success momentarily shone on the British arms. On one of the last days of the past year, Savannah, the capital of Georgia, had been taken; another expedition advanced in the rear from Florida; and by the middle of January, the whole province had been reduced. The royal authority thence threatened to extend over all the southern States. The Carolinas were both in great danger by movements of the Tories in the South and military operations in the North. D'Estaing's arrival on the coast was so little expected, that a ship of war and three frigates had not time to escape. The French admiral, proud of his achievements in

the West Indies, prepared, in conjunction with the American troops, to besiege Savannah with an overwhelming force both by sea and land. His summons to surrender was met with contempt. His combined attack, after a terrible bombardment, was stubbornly repulsed. The conqueror of Grenada, and his American associates, found that this joint operation prospered no better than that on Rhode Island in the previous year. With a sickly army and disheartened fleet, D'Estaing, on the 1st of November, left the American coast to return home: and the Colonists, with bitter mortification, had some reason to ask, what, after all, they had gained by the powerful French armament.

The alliance had certainly not produced all the effect anticipated. With the appearance of the French by their side, the efforts of the Americans themselves very perceptibly declined. This summer little had been done by them, though, with the reduced state of his army, Sir H. Clinton was evidently on the defensive in New York; and it does not seem impossible that by striking one vigorous blow, corresponding with what had been achieved with much smaller means in the earlier years of hostilities, Washington might have almost finished the war. The campaign on both sides was nothing more than a series of languid and desultory excursions, with varying success, up the North River and at Stoney Point, on the coast of Connecticut, and at Paulus Hook. To the eastward, the sturdy Bostonians failed miserably in a spirited enterprise against Penobscot, which cost them almost a royal navy. It must be confessed that as soon as France threw her weight into the scale, and thus virtually secured American independence, she terminated the most heroic portion of the American war, which can only be

confined to the time when the Colonists singly contended, as at Bunker's Hill and Long Island, for their liberties, against a proud, powerful, and victorious empire.

Confronting such mighty odds, impolitic and stubborn as she might be, the heroism was now at least on the side of England. Disinterested nations could not but gaze with astonishment at the formidable confederacy formed against her ; and at the bold defiance with which she met the worst efforts of her foes. By concentrating her efforts in her own defence, and giving up the nominal supremacy for which she contended over the Colonies, as Burke and his friends so strongly advised her to do, she might yet, under the guidance of a better Ministry, have made France and Spain pay dearly for their hypocritical enthusiasm in favour of colonial freedom. It has been candidly admitted by Americans themselves, that it was only in British provinces the liberty they claimed could be tenable as a principle.* France and Spain would indeed have been surprised, had any of their colonies claimed a right which they denied to their subjects at home. For these two Powers then, to make common cause with the Americans under the pretence of abhorring the injustice with which they were treated by England, was a flagrant falsehood which might have immediately, as assuredly it did ultimately, draw upon the heads of its authors the signal chastisement of all such diplomatic lies. Had these august representatives of the House of Bourbon understood their own interests, they would have known that they had more to fear from the establishment of the great American republic than the King of England had ; that they were, in fact, uncrowning themselves at the feet of a democratic power,

* Bancroft's History of the American Revolution.

of whose strength they knew nothing, while they only imagined that they were seizing a favourable opportunity for stripping the English diadem of some of its richest jewels. Notwithstanding their mighty fleets, which covered the seas, it was not from her old rivals that England had most to fear. Her worst enemies were at home. They consisted in an incompetent ministry, that, with the most consummate blindness, gave her reason to exclaim, like her unfortunate James II., "Oh, God ! my own children have combined against me."

It was not enough to lose the command of the Channel. It was not enough to be beaten in the West Indies. It was not enough to see at New York a great army dwindle into a garrison. Ireland also at last sprang to arms.

Finding that the English Parliament had been prorogued, and nothing done to relieve the distresses of their country, the patriotic spirit burst at once into a flame. The associations against British commerce extended throughout the whole kingdom. As the alarm of invasion had converted the people into a nation of armed volunteers, they determined to resist the power of France and Spain, and to extort at the same time a commercial independence from the hands of reluctant England. The popular array at length amounted to forty thousand men : they assumed a decidedly hostile attitude to the Lord Lieutenant and the royal troops ; and two distinct armies appeared ready at any moment to commence a struggle for supremacy on a soil from which all traces of national life appeared long ago to have been trodden down for ever under the hoof of the oppressor. Then was seen the wisdom of the advice Burke and Lord Rockingham had given the Ministry during the last

session of the British Legislature. Then was seen how much danger had been incurred by Government in proroguing Parliament, contrary to the representations of all who were acquainted with Ireland, without adopting any plan either to refuse or to grant her most reasonable demands. Anxious for the welfare of both countries, as he saw the storm gathering on all sides from his retreat at Beaconsfield, Burke thought that the continuance of the prorogation of the Irish Legislature, and an immediate summons of the British Parliament to take the state of Ireland into consideration, was the only prudent policy which circumstances permitted the Government to adopt.

Ministers did exactly the opposite. The prorogation in England continued, and the Irish assembly on College Green was allowed to meet as usual in the middle of October. They at once asserted, in the Address to the Throne, that nothing less than a free trade could save the country from ruin. In carrying this document to the Lord Lieutenant, the Speaker, attended by the Duke of Leinster as the commander of the Dublin Volunteers, had to pass from the Parliament House to the Castle, through streets with the armed patriots drawn up on both sides, and giving unequivocal evidence of their political sympathies. The popular party, with a young orator for their leader, Henry Grattan, who had been introduced to Parliament for a borough under the influence of Lord Charlemont, determined that this should be no idle demonstration. Instead of voting the supplies for two years, they gave notice of proposing a Money Bill for only six months, that the sitting of the Parliament might be indispensable for the credit of the country. Riots broke out in the streets. The courtiers were intimidated. The short Money Bill, which Lord

North could not even at the last moment believe that the Irish patriots would ever have the audacity to propose, passed through both Houses ; and he and his colleagues had no alternative but to advise his Majesty to sanction, with true Christian meekness, this most humiliating measure.*

The stoutest champions of imperial authority were fairly cowed. At the close of the autumnal recess, the gloom of the American war overshadowed every domestic hearth. Travellers who had been absent from their country on Continental tours, were struck, on returning home, with the symptoms of depression which no fictitious gaiety could conceal.† The appearance of the Bourbon fleets in the narrow seas and on the coasts, with other signal illustrations of the defenceless condition of the country, had been more potent on the understandings of the majority, than all Burke's wonderful eloquence and unrivalled powers of reasoning : and the folly and wickedness of the contest had at length been brought home to the bosoms of the whole community.

To frame a Royal Speech under such circumstances was not easy. As his Majesty could not boast of any leading success, he only rejoiced that the efforts of his enemies had not produced all the mischief they might have done. Nothing was said about America. Nothing was said about the West Indies. But to Burke's exquisite amusement, the Irish people, then standing with arms in their hands, on the brink of rebellion, were for the first time in a Royal Address from a Sovereign of the House of Brunswick, complimented as faithful and

* See *Annual Register*, 1780.

† *Wraxall's Historical Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 318.

loyal subjects; and Parliament was earnestly recommended to consider what further advantages could be given to Ireland, in order to promote the union, peace, and prosperity of the whole Empire.

The Opposition assumed a very determined aspect. Disdaining a mere criticism of details, they moved amendments in both Houses, reminding the Sovereign of the glorious position of the country when he came to the throne; dwelling pathetically on the sad calamities which it now endured; and respectfully but earnestly assuring him that no good could possibly be expected unless he at once entirely changed the system of administration, by taking into his council new men and new measures. The debate in the House of Commons was singularly vigorous and animated. Fox took the lead. Burke was labouring under such a severe attack of cold and hoarseness, that he was scarcely able to speak; but when he rose to apologize for this temporary disorder of his vocal powers, and feared that he could not address the House with satisfaction, by a loud and unanimous shout from all sides, he was called upon to proceed.* He replied to Henry Dundas, the Lord Advocate, who, with true Caledonian pertinacity, had risen to political eminence by his bold and unscrupulous defence of all the Ministerial measures relating to America; and particularly, as Burke reminded him in the last session,† had acquired the nickname of Starvation Dundas, by his unrelenting championship of that merciless Prohibitory Bill which consigned thousands of honest and industrious people to all the miseries of famine. The rapid success of such adventurers as Dundas and Wedderburne, blessed or cursed with ready tongues,

* Parl. Hist., vol. xx. p. 1132.

† Ibid., vol. xx. p. 872.

unscrupulous consciences, and shameless foreheads, while Burke himself, with his splendid genius and irreproachable integrity, remained in such very narrow circumstances, is indeed one of the most melancholy features of those times, and of the system which a pious and virtuous King had so much at heart. Burke's speech, as might be supposed, was on this occasion shorter than usual; but he vehemently upbraided Lord North for having, by the most incompetent trifling, produced the alarming circumstances in Ireland. He was compelled from his indisposition to defer an elaborate exposition of his sentiments to a future day; and, though the Ministers triumphed in the division on the Address by a majority of ninety-nine, that day was not very far distant.

The condition of Ireland demanded immediate decision. Lord North candidly confessed that he was ignorant both of the remedy and disease. Following the example of Lord Shelburne in the Lords, the Earl of Upper Ossory moved, on the 6th of December, a direct vote of censure in the Commons against the Ministry, for having neglected any effectual measures for the relief of Ireland, and for having permitted the discontents of that people to rise to such a height as to endanger the constitutional connection of the two kingdoms. Both Fox and Burke, or, as they were now generally called, the two great leaders of Opposition,* powerfully supported the motion. For some expressions in the debate on the first night of the session, Fox had acted with much manliness and intrepidity in a duel which he had been compelled to fight, and in which he had been wounded. He appeared in the House, for the first time after that event, on this motion of censure; and, from the danger he had

* Annual Register, 1780, p. 72.

undergone, was an object of more than usual interest. Burke's speech was a keen and indignant parallel between the recent proceedings in Ireland and those which had produced the American war. He contrasted, with biting sarcasm, the rash vigour of the Ministry in locking up the port of Boston and abrogating the Charter of Massachusetts, with their evident hesitation, in sight of the Irish people, led by their Parliament, upheld by their volunteers, and urged onward by the rioters in the streets of their capital. Why was not the port of Dublin shut up, Cork left in flames, and Waterford reduced to ashes? Why were not the formalities of a jury altered in Ireland, and the Dublin rioters brought over to England for trial? The reason was plain. Ministers themselves virtually admitted the madness of their conduct towards America, and they were obliged to represent as prudent and constitutional in Ireland what they had treated elsewhere as acts of rebellion. Burke alluded to his own position, as an Irishman by birth, and as an English senator bound to consider most especially the interests of his adopted country; and, with earnest and pathetic eloquence, he declared that he could not but condemn a policy that had placed it out of the power of a statesman to deliberate for the benefit of Ireland on measures which every one knew would be conceded to force.*

Lord North soon amply illustrated these observations. The Short Money Bill had not been proposed when Parliament met; but the news of the adoption of this expedient afterwards arrived; and the Prime Minister found all his predictions falsified, and himself and his Sovereign involved in the greatest embarrassment. The thirteenth

* *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xx. p. 1205. *Collected Speeches*, vol. i. p. 450.

of December was one of the most humiliating days through which a British House of Commons ever passed. On that afternoon Lord North came down; and, forgetting all his recent professions, and especially his solemn declaration that he never would consent to allow Ireland to trade freely, even with the West Indies, he developed lucidly the proposals he had laid before the House a few days before, conceding to Ireland the liberty of trading with all the Colonies, the West Indies, Africa, and America, allowing freely the importation and exportation of glass, and, hardest sacrifice of all, giving up absolutely that most inveterate of commercial prejudices, the prohibition on the exportation of the Irish woollen manufactures. All the jealous monopolies of the English trader were surrendered by the Prime Minister at sight of the drawn sword of the Irish volunteer. Lord North's easy imperturbability of temper and manner was certainly required to give a tolerable appearance to concessions which, in their smallest extent, he had so recently refused. He spoke most ably and fully for more than two hours. The leek was never eaten more gracefully. Those who could have heard the Minister then for the first time, would have imagined that this happy statesman had always been in favour of a free trade with Ireland, and that Burke and his friends on the Opposition benches, were the prejudiced monopolists who had prevented the Prime Minister from carrying his good wishes into effect. "I never," Burke said afterwards, "heard a more elaborate, more able, more convincing, and more shameful speech. The debater obtained credit; but the statesman was disgraced for ever."*

Burke, on his part, preserved a silence almost absolute

* Letter to John Merlot, Esq.

on the passing of the three resolutions. He had recommended the policy of the propositions when Parliament was really in possession of its deliberate capacity; but by deservedly censuring the Minister, or by showing the whole scope of his concessions, England might be alarmed, Ireland irritated, and the peace of the two kingdoms most seriously endangered. "If Ministers can assure me that Ireland will be satisfied with these propositions, I shall be satisfied," was, in substance, all that he thought fit to express. But it was not all that he did. With rare patriotism, he used his utmost influence with his friends, to prevent them from throwing any obstacles in the course of this legislation; he even endeavoured to persuade English Members not to countenance petitions against Bills which, at any other time, would have provoked a fierce opposition from the large manufacturing towns: and he found that his conduct was on this business as little appreciated as most of his other disinterested and magnanimous endeavours. While his constituents in Bristol were in a rage with him for not doing all he could to defeat the Bills, Ireland chose to forget all he risked for her, and to blame him for not more openly supporting measures which were not really opposed.

When Lord North's propositions became known in that country, they effected a sudden change of opinion, characteristic of the light-hearted and enthusiastic race. They had hitherto regarded the Minister as one of their greatest enemies: they now considered him their greatest friend. Rejoicing in the favour of the Government, both the Irish Parliament and the populace of Dublin began to look down with scorn on the Whig Opposition in England, and particularly on Burke, who had hitherto

been so popular. They saw nothing but the extent of the Minister's proposals. His indifference, his driving out of the House the Bill of last session opening the West Indian trade, his yielding to a necessity he could not resist, were circumstances altogether passed over by them in the ebullition of Irish gratitude. Lord North himself risked nothing in the cause of Ireland; they had evidence that Burke had hazarded much. Yet, forgetting that their eloquent countryman had to perform a duty to England as well as to the land of his birth, because he did not join in extravagant compliments to the Minister who had resisted most impolitely to the last moment, and then surrendered all the authority of Government in a panic, they looked on Burke as a traitor to that patriotic cause which he had been the first to espouse.

He was informed in the Christmas week by a letter from a clever young barrister and politician in Dublin, Thomas Burgh, of this alteration in the sentiments of his countrymen. Though he generally spoke with indifference of mere popularity, he was not a little affected on learning that he had fallen in the estimation of his admirers in Ireland. The folly and injustice of this treatment by the Irish patriots, could not render his heart insensible to a pang which his deep and sacred love for the country of his birth rendered most acute. He was unable to resist the impulse of writing an explanatory letter of some four sheets in length, which he desired Mr. Burgh to show in manuscript to all his old friends in Dublin. It was a powerful and conclusive defence of his own conduct on this subject, entering fully into a statement of the facts as they arose, and showing in every paragraph how much he had really attempted to do for

Ireland, and how few thanks she really owed to Lord North for yielding to the fear of her strength what he never would have granted to the justice of her prayers. Mr. Burgh was much pleased at having been chosen as the medium of conveying his great correspondent's thoughts to his Irish friends. He had many copies of the letter made, and sent to Grattan, Monk Mason, Hutchinson, and others, who all saw at once the real merits of the question. Contrary to Burke's desire, it also shortly afterwards found its way into the newspapers, and became accessible to the reading public of both islands. His prospects in Bristol at the approaching election were not improved by it; but, on the great constituency of an enlightened posterity, its recommendatory influence has been, and ever must be, most eloquently powerful.

This letter was composed on the first day of the great year 1780, which in its progress was to be so full of instruction to all who should take any interest in public events, or in the private history of the untiring individual by whom, in his study at Beaconsfield, it was thus auspiciously begun.*

* See Letter to Thomas Burgh, Esq., in Burke's Works.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

1780.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMER.

WHILE Ireland was being submissively conciliated, England was at last awakening to the consciousness of her alarming situation. The hour of delusion had passed. From the Metropolis, and the towns exposed to invasion on the coasts, the sense of insecurity gradually pervaded the whole kingdom. It was but natural that, under such circumstances, the minds of the people should turn to a consideration of the system of Court influence which had so long maintained in office so indolent and inefficient a Ministry, and that an intense abhorrence of abuses in the Government should gradually take root in the hearts of all the independent portion of the nation. The pressure of taxation which the necessities of an extended war demanded, warmly fostered this popular sentiment. Hence it is at this time we behold a strong desire being first manifested for rigorous inquiries into the expenditure of the public money, and a just indignation against the incompetent persons in high offices who were supposed to profit by a policy which seemed directly to threaten the ruin of the country. As Parliament was sitting before Christmas, a confused and inarticulate cry for administrative reform had made itself heard; and several motions were made by the

leaders of Opposition in both Houses, calculated to show their readiness to comply with this growing demand from a burdened and disheartened people.

The Rockingham and Shelburne parties on this, as on other questions, appeared eager to run a race of rivalry. But though Lord Shelburne exerted himself earnestly in the House of Lords, and his two able followers, Barré and Dunning, displayed equal vigour in the House of Commons, it was the Rockingham connection, with Burke as their selected champion, that, in public estimation, carried off the prize for economical reform. On the same day, in the middle of December, that Lord Shelburne made an important motion, declaring the necessity of reducing the public expenditure, Burke, in the other House, gave a general statement of an economical plan of which he had given notice, which had excited much curiosity, and which he pledged himself to take an early opportunity after Christmas of proposing for the approval of the Legislature. He undertook to reform by system, to give the country an economical constitution, to save at once some two hundred thousand a year to the public purse, and to free the House of Commons from the influence of some fifty Members of Parliament, by doing away with the useless offices which, for corrupt purposes, they held under the Crown. He would effect his object in such a manner, that no person could justly complain of hardship. He would be governed by the rules of law. He would be governed by the dictates of merciful equity. He would destroy no employment really useful; nor take from the Crown a sufficient fund for rewarding merit; nor leave it without the power of maintaining itself in a dignified and suitable magnificence. But he would attempt to render Govern-

ment strong, and the people contented, that in war the nation might be formidable to all enemies ; and that a state of peace, when it should come, might be truly refreshing and reproductive.*

In the course of the speech, as the orator quoted the classical aphorism, *Magnum vectigal est parsimonia*, he was guilty of pronouncing the second syllable in “*vectigal*” short. Lord North, as ready in such matters as English statesmen have generally prided themselves on being, quietly corrected the blunder. “The noble Lord,” replied Burke, “hints that I have erred in the quantity of a principal word in my quotation. I rejoice at it, because it gives me an opportunity of repeating the inestimable adage.” He shouted out at the highest pitch of his voice, “*Magnum vec-tī-gal est parsimonia.*” Members who could little appreciate his philosophy and statesmanship, enjoyed heartily this mistake in a Latin quantity ; and it has been related, with minute circumstantiality, by those who have left this system of economical reform and the other great features of his political life altogether untouched.

Lord John Cavendish, as the hereditary leader of the old Whigs, declared that Burke had communicated his plan to him ; and that, so far as he had seen it, he gave it his most unqualified approbation. Fox, who had been attending the debate on Lord Shelburne’s motion in the other House, observed, in complimenting Burke and his economical scheme, that he had just heard statesmen of great weight in the Lords libelling the House of Commons. “ Every instance they give of uncorrected abuse with regard to public money, and they give many and

* Parliamentary History, vol. xx. p. 1293. Collected Speeches, vol. ii. p. 1.

strong instances, is a libel on this House. Every argument they use for the reduction of prodigal expense, and their arguments are various and unanswerable, is a libel on this House. Everything they state of the luxuriant growth of corrupt influence, and it was never half so flourishing, is a libel on this House.”* Lord North said nothing. His silence was not an unfavourable omen. Burke had every reason to be satisfied with the reception his first hasty sketch of his intended reforms had met with; and encouraged by all his immediate political friends, he could not but labour with increasing zeal to perfect the system of economy which he was shortly to present to the House of Commons.

Before that time arrived, he unexpectedly found himself strengthened by the support of some powerful allies. On one of the last days of the year, a large meeting of the clergymen, gentlemen, and freeholders of Yorkshire was held in the City of York. This gathering was an entirely spontaneous movement on the part of the smaller landed proprietors of the county; though Lord Rockingham, Sir George Savile, and other wealthy politicians appeared at the assembly, they did not originate it, and it had results on which they did not calculate.† A petition to the House of Commons was unanimously voted, complaining of the heavy public burdens and of the wasteful profusion of the Government, and praying that, before new impositions were adopted, Parliament would, in its wisdom, endeavour to correct the gross abuses in the national expenditure, abolish all sinecure places and undeserved

* Fox’s Speeches, vol. i. p. 223.

† Mason’s Correspondence with Walpole places this point beyond dispute. See vol. ii. pp. 53 and 59.

pensions, and apply these savings to the necessities of the State.

They did not content themselves with carrying the petition. Wishing their example to be followed by other counties, a Committee of Correspondence was formed, to adopt the necessary means of giving it effect. The petition and resolutions were published in the newspapers, and a strange ferment soon appeared in all parts of England. Middlesex seconded Yorkshire. The movement then became general, if not universal. More than twenty-four counties in England and Wales either formally adopted the Yorkshire petition, or came to resolutions embodying the same meaning. The only objection, seriously entertained in some places, was to the Committees of Correspondence. Such associations had powerfully influenced the rebellious spirit in North America. Such associations had had no inconsiderable influence in producing the popular co-operation with the armed volunteers that had just extorted a freedom of trade in Ireland. It was not surprising therefore that they should be regarded with some dislike by the country gentlemen of England. But though the torrent might meet here and there with an obstacle, nothing could permanently resist the force of this purifying stream, as it first gushed forth from the soil, eager to sweep away the barriers of corruption. Lord Sandwich, unrivalled as he was in all the arts of electioneering, and in marshalling his supporters both at St. Stephen's and the India House, was beaten even in his own county. The great question of economical reform, in which Burke was to take the lead, had, by the February of 1780, risen in the public mind to a magnitude for which he could never have ventured to hope, and at which the Ministers, who

in December might not be alarmed at his first announcement, could not but be appalled.*

On the eighth of February, Sir George Savile presented the Yorkshire petition to the House of Commons. It excited more interest than any document of the kind since the inauguration of the system of courtly influence by means of corruption which had begun under Lord Bute; which, with but one rare interval, had continued up to that time; which had repeatedly violated the rights of electors in 1769; which had lost thirteen colonies, and produced the fearful situation in which the nation then shook to the foundations. But this system was doomed. At length the voice of the people, roused by the crisis of misgovernment, was making itself heard. Sir George Savile was so hoarse that he could with difficulty articulate; but every sentence was listened to by an anxious and crowded House; and he spoke the language of indignant patriotism. Even the most resolute of courtiers did not venture to object to the petition. But Lord North sarcastically observed, that he was not so surprised as Sir George Savile, in the similarity between the sentiments it expressed and the ideas of economical reform which Burke had broached, and on which he had, in a few days, to make an important motion; and the Prime Minister very clearly implied his belief that the Yorkshire meeting had been suggested by Burke and Lord Rockingham, to serve their party purposes. Lord George Gordon, whose wild language and eccentric conduct was beginning to amuse the House, though none that then laughed at him dreamed what mischief his gloomy fanaticism and insane eccentricity would produce before the session closed, said that reformation ought to begin with

* See *Annual Register*, 1780, pp. 85-88.

religion, complimented Burke on his powers for misleading his hearers by Jesuitical ambiguities, and affirmed that he was made, both as an economist and friend of toleration, the cat's-paw of the Ministry.

In replying to the Prime Minister's insinuations, Burke made some good-tempered remarks on Lord George Gordon's strange speech. He assured the noble President of the Protestant Association, that he had so very poor opinion of those talents for deceit on which he had been complimented, that they would always be his very last resource. "The noble Lord supposes," said Burke, "that I have been made a cat's-paw, in the instances alluded to, by the Ministry. I suppose that before people take a cat by the paw, they must have a good opinion of the gentle and tractable nature of the particular animal; for there are cats so fierce that it would not be safe to meddle with their paws. Now I do not know that the Ministry have ever found me of so very pliant a nature that they would venture to seize me by the paws. The noble Lord also thinks that my conduct with regard to the disciples of the Church of Rome did not proceed from any religious considerations; and in this he likewise imagines that he pays me a compliment. But the noble Lord is mistaken. I was influenced by religion; I was influenced by the only religion I profess; I mean that which is most compatible with the sentiments of universal humanity and benevolence." He declared, on his honour, that he had neither directly nor indirectly interfered in any manner with the county association of Yorkshire, or with any other county association. He had not even influenced in the least degree the petition which had been sent from his own constituents; and he had always told those who asked his advice, that it was not sufficient

merely to sign such a memorial. He had indeed received a highly complimentary letter from Bristol, accompanying the petition ; "but," added Burke, "as it contains praises which I do not deserve, I shall not read it to the House. Let a regard to truth prevail over the love of fame."*

For the moment he had become extremely popular. All England sang his praises. He was carried along with the spring tide of this sudden agitation for economical reform. Conscious of the high position he occupied as the acknowledged leader in the movement, seeing that, for once, he was not almost hopelessly toiling against the stream of delusion, and feeling confident that the long Parliamentary struggle would soon be crowned with success, his wit was at this time as playful as it was brilliant, and his temper more gentle than at any future period. Of this transient serenity in his disposition, the great speech in bringing forward the motion which had caused so much popular excitement and expectation, contained many most pleasing indications.

This memorable exposition of his plan of reform was made on the eleventh of February, three days after the presentation of the Yorkshire petition. The expectation of the great audience was never more highly raised ; yet the performance far surpassed all expectation. The circumstances of the moment, and especially the reforms which Louis XVI. was making at the same time, were skilfully taken advantage of in the opening of the address to enforce the cause Burke pleaded with more than his usual eloquence and power. He laid down the principles on which he had resolved to reform, principles at once most liberal and most conservative, and then proceeded

* Parl. Hist., vol. xx. p. 1382.

to their application. Those who looked only cursorily at the kingdom, would suppose that it was one solid and compact monarchy ; it was in truth, besides the supreme authority, composed of five distinct sovereign jurisdictions, the Principality of Wales, the Duchy of Lancaster, the County Palatine and Earldom of Chester, and the Duchy of Cornwall. All these separate dominions, with their consequential establishments, derived from the middle ages, and only kept up for influencing Parliament, he proposed to abolish. By disposing of the landed estates of the Crown and the forest lands, and extinguishing the forest rights, other burdensome offices of no real utility, such as that of the Surveyor-General and those of the two Chief Justices in Eyre, would also be swept away. By making bargains for the Royal Household on the principle of a contract, and steadily economizing by system, the Board of Green Cloth, the officers of the Great Wardrobe and the Removing Wardrobe, the Jewel Office, the Robe Office, with their three useless Treasuries, might all be extinguished. To the Board of Works also the principle of a contract was to be applied, and it was to be placed under the superintendence of a real builder. On the principle of a manufactory the Mint was also to be regulated, and its business also done by contract. The military branch of the Ordnance Office was to be sent to the army, and the maritime portion to the navy. The Pay Office, the most invidious of all establishments, from the enormous pecuniary gains attending the bank that was held in it, was, with the corresponding Treasury of the Navy, to become a mere office of administration ; the emolument of the Paymaster to be confined to his salary ; and the money which he was now allowed to hold for his own profit, to

be paid into the Bank of England. Thus also the Treasury and office of Paymaster of the Pensions might fall, and all such payments be transferred to the Exchequer. In some respects, however, Burke could not comply with the direct request of the petitioners. He would not take away any pension ; for such a course would inflict great hardship on individuals, without applying any efficient remedy to the abuse. But by limiting the fund from which pensions were given, to six hundred thousand pounds a year, or any other specific sum, all extravagance of this kind would be checked. He would not abolish the great patent offices of the Exchequer, or interfere in any manner with the present holders ; but as the lives and rever- sions fell in, he proposed to reduce their emoluments to fixed salaries, that some rewards for merit, not under the name of pensions, might still remain at the disposal of the Crown. He would not reduce the exorbitant profits of efficient offices, because he knew no efficient office of which the profits were exorbitant. Two of his last pro- posed reforms, though they were the first to be brought under the decision of the House, were to abolish the offices of the Third, or Colonial Secretary of State, and the Board of Trade and Plantations. He also undertook to regulate the settlement of salaries according to a gradu- ated scale, in which the payment of the judges, am- bassadors, and the tradesmen of the Court, should be fully secured, and any loss from a deficiency of revenue in the civil list, fall primarily on the emoluments of the Ministers at the Treasury, from whose neglect it must have been incurred, and secondly on the great persons of the household, who always had access to the King's person, were generally more in favour than the Prime Minister himself, and whose rebellion on an insolvent

quarter-day, would be more dreadful than that of the united colonies.

The bare outline of this scheme gives, however, no idea of the comprehensive spirit with which it was combined into one uniform system of economical reform. Still less does it give any idea of the wonderful variety of wit, anecdote, eloquence, and poetic illustration introduced into that wonderful oration, which, as a whole, must be considered the most finished and brilliant specimen of its author's genius. It is that which, in the smallest compass, displays most amply and profusely all his intellectual powers: the boldness and originality of his proposed reforms, united with the calmest and most conservative wisdom; his vivid powers of representing the past in all the most alluring charms of the imagination; his astounding flashes of wit illuminating the whole subject, and blazing on every side with the most dazzling radiance; his ability for treating the humblest subjects of domestic and financial detail in the most fervid and brilliant language of the poet; his singular analytical skill; the closeness of his reasoning powers; the copiousness of his rhetoric; and the glowing fervour of his appeals to the nobler passions of his hearers.

For three hours he held his audience under his irresistible spell. Ministerialists, courtiers, sycophants, sinecurists, all gave the most complete testimony to the orator's success. Tumultuous cheers and roars of laughter attended him throughout the course of his speech. At the close of his peroration, when he called on the Commons in Parliament assembled to be one and the same thing with the Commons at large, and entreated them to throw aside the temptations of the Government,

to return to their natural home, and to incorporate themselves with their constituents, it almost seemed, from the simultaneous burst of enthusiasm from all quarters, that the race of king-friends was extinct, that the House had no such characters in it as Rigby and Wedderburne, and that there were not nearly a hundred ministerial retainers, all of whose political aspirations extended only to the receipt of their next quarter's salaries.

Yet of these, the great historian of the Roman Empire was one. "Never," said he, afterwards, "can I forget the delight with which that diffusive and ingenious orator, Mr. Burke, was heard, and even by those whose existence he proscribed."* The most ready and significant testimony to the merits of the manner in which Burke had propounded his reforms, was made that very evening by Lord North. After Fox had seconded the motion for the introduction of the first of the five Bills, which embodied the whole plan, so far as it had yet been brought to maturity, the Prime Minister rose. "The speech," said Lord North, "is one of the ablest I have ever heard, and it is one which, though I have had the happiness of knowing many men of very brilliant talents, I believe the honourable gentleman only could have made."

But the Minister requested Burke to postpone the introduction of some of the Bills until the consent of the Sovereign and the Prince of Wales were obtained to measures which interfered with their hereditary property. Burke, on constitutional grounds, contended that, with or without consulting the Royal Family, Parliament had a right to make what regulations it pleased in respect to

* Gibbon's *Miscellaneous Works*, vol. i. p. 156.

the property of the Crown. As a mere matter of decorum, however, he at last consented to postpone the remaining four Bills. No opposition was made by the Government to the motion for the introduction of that which proposed to regulate the civil establishment. It was not however unopposed. Lord George Gordon wildly declaimed against the scheme and against the Ministers ; and, stoutly asserting that the whole thing was a juggle between Burke and Lord North, he insisted on dividing the House. The Yeas went forth into the lobby. Lord George, as one of the tellers for the Noes, remained in his place, and found himself, without a second teller, left alone in a minority of one.*

On the following Monday, three of the other four Bills Burke also brought in without opposition. To the one, however, relating to the Duchy of Cornwall, the Surveyor-General of the department objected, on the pretence of maintaining the rights of the Prince of Wales, who was then a minor. Lord North did not rise. Burke, though firmly opposed to the principle of the courtly Surveyor-General who was, of course, eager to keep his own sinecure, felt that it would not be prudent to quarrel with the Government on that stage of the proceedings, and on a mere question of form. He consented to withdraw the fifth Bill for the moment, but pledged himself to take an early and more favourable opportunity for renewing the motion.*

On the twenty-third, he presented the House with a copy of the Establishment Bill. It was formally read a first time. He then proposed, that it should be read again on the twenty-ninth ; and it was on this point that the lurking hostility of the Government to the whole scheme was first prominently displayed.

* Parl. Hist., vol. xxi. p. 73.

† Ibid., vol. xxi. p. 75.

Hitherto Lord North and his colleagues had felt themselves borne down by the popular torrent, and by that commanding power of genius which had risen so proudly on the full swell of the advancing stream, and threatened to direct its force with matchless skill against the ponderous bulwark of courtly influence. Hoping that the first impetuosity would soon abate, they had therefore given way to the storm. Wishing to gain more time, the Prime Minister now asserted that the twenty-ninth was much too early a day on which to take the second reading of a Bill of such importance, and abounding in so many complicated details. Burke replied, that the principle of the measure was very simple, and the Minister might easily say whether or not he assented to that principle. But neither side was yet disposed for a general engagement. A kind of compromise was effected; and the second reading fixed for the second of March.

On that day the Bill was unanimously carried through the second reading. But Lord George Gordon, on the question that it should be committed, again divided the House, and by accident was more successful than in opposing the introduction. At the division, the lobby became so full that ninety gentlemen were compelled to remain in the House, and were formally numbered as the supporters of the noble Protestant enthusiast, who appeared to consider Burke's proposals for economy as insidious efforts to establish Popery.

Burke then proposed that the Bill should be committed on the next day. The Ministers maintained that it was very unusual to go into committee on a Bill the day immediately following that on which it had been read a first time, and they moved that "tomorrow" should be struck out of the motion, and "next Wednesday" inserted. Fox

roundly accused Lord North of double dealing. Lord North replied, that as the Bill consisted of a variety of allegations, and was in fact a farrago of incidents, he could scarcely be considered unreasonable in calling for evidence in support of so many assertions. Burke retorted contemptuously, that every one knew the first clause of the Bill to be the only one that could be taken into consideration on the first day of the committee; that this clause stated the office of a third Secretary of State to be useless; and that he could not be expected to bring the deputy, the clerks, or the fire-lighter, to vouch for facts which of course must be left to the experience of every individual Member. He concluded with remarking that Lord North had at last thrown off the mask, and that on the next Wednesday the Government evidently intended to throw out in detail the Bill which they had not dared to reject on principle.

These were indeed Lord North's tactics. But the staunch King's friends, who felt that their existence as a corps was menaced, and the fund from which they had so long derived the wages of corruption about to be taken away, had looked on these cautious proceedings of the Ministers with intense disgust. On the appointed day for taking the first clause into consideration, therefore, Rigby, as the boldest and most shameless of the band, both to the surprise of his colleagues in the Government and to the Opposition among whom he still continued to sit, suddenly questioned the right of the House to interfere at all with the civil establishments of the Crown, or to dispose of places and possessions which he maintained to belong exclusively to the Sovereign, either as part of his royal prerogative, or as his own private property. Anxious for his endangered profits, the hardy

Paymaster met Burke and the Opposition on the high monarchical ground, and gave them the opportunity of settling a question that, knowing the advantages with which they could contend, they were glad enough to bring to a direct issue. But the same reasons which influenced the Whigs, eager to bring on such a contest, rendered Lord North extremely averse to the engagement. Economy was one of the virtues most respected by country gentlemen; though they had long supported the Government, they had no sympathy with the King's friends, or with the mercenary principle on which these pretorians served; and on such a question they would as one man have gone over to the ranks of the Opposition. These conflicting motives produced on this occasion one of the most curious spectacles that the House of Commons has ever exhibited.

Fox rose, and thanked Rigby for having so honestly met the Opposition in front. In a speech full of irony, he insisted that as such an objection was hostile to every portion of the Bill, it was absolutely necessary to take the sense of the House upon it before expressing any opinion on details; and he declared, that if the right of the Commons to control the expenditure of the civil list was denied by a majority, he would consider his functions as a representative of the people at an end, and never again enter the House. Burke supported Fox in demanding that this question should be at once determined. He contended that Rigby's doctrine was contrary to the privileges of Parliament, and subversive of every principle of the Constitution. He affirmed, that as the Crown held no public right, no public property, except as a trust for the welfare of the whole community; as every right of his Majesty was only a delegated right,

and the royal revenue of every kind only bestowed for the purposes of Government, there was no right of the Crown that could not be examined, no abuse that could not be corrected, no portion of the revenue that could not be controlled.*

The question had become, whether or not Righy's proposition should be immediately considered. On this point the House divided at nine o'clock in the evening, all the Opposition voting for bringing the matter at once to a decision, and the supporters of the Government for postponing it as an abstract principle, which it was neither necessary to affirm nor deny. The doughty Paymaster walked into the lobby with Burke, and voted against his official colleagues. The Opposition counted one hundred and ninety-nine, the Government two hundred and five; so that on the previous question, Lord North had only a majority of six. The days when he could confidently sleep throughout the delivery of Burke's eloquent invectives against misgovernment, relying on a majority of three or four to one, were over. The scheme of reform propounded with such wonderful ability in Parliament, and the speech published so that it might be read by the sympathizing people in every English county, had almost converted a minority into a majority; and threatened to destroy a Government which was supported by so mighty an influence, which had so long bidden defiance to public opinion, and which had not been driven from power even by a world in arms.

The first clause of the Bill was then taken into consideration. It proposed to abolish the office of third or Colonial Secretary of State, as useless; and the history of that department, with the condition in which the

* *Collected Speeches*, vol. ii. p. 119.

Colonies had fallen since its establishment, had only too completely proved this absolute inefficiency. Until the year 1768, Colonial affairs had been administered by the Board of Trade. On the junction of the Bedford party with the Grafton Administration, the office had been created, to accommodate Lord Hillsborough, who signalized the commencement of his Colonial Administration by a circular letter, to which Burke was never tired of alluding, and which he always carried about in his pocket, pledging the word of his Sovereign against the exercise of the power of imperial taxation over America. One of the last Colonial Ministers had been Lord Suffolk, who, before he died, had been confined twelve months to his bed by gout, and had still, with his green despatch-box on his pillow, remained nominally Colonial Minister while a disastrous civil war was being waged in the provinces under his management. The courtiers again attempted to argue that the revenues of the Civil List were the King's private property; and this doctrine Burke indignantly stigmatized as not even Toryism, but the abstract principle of Jacobitism, sublimated and refined into a system of the most humiliating slavery. All his wit, imagination, and rhetoric were employed in showing the maladministration of this most unfortunate office. The brightest colours of his fancy were however reserved for painting the last days of Lord Suffolk, whom he described in his office, as lying for twelve months together in funeral state, as in a kind of Jerusalem Chamber, with a hatchment over the door, and with escutcheons and lights round the corpse. Both the Ministers and leaders of Opposition displayed the utmost generalship in bringing up their forces. After one of the most exciting days ever known in the Commons, the House

divided, at nearly three o'clock in the morning. The Government succeeded in defeating the clause, but only by a majority of seven; and one of their own officials despondingly remarked, that unless the Prime Minister were better supported, it would be impossible for him any longer to carry on the Administration.*

The Ministerial prospects were not improved when the struggle, five days afterwards, was renewed. It was on the clause to abolish the Board of Trade. The great historian of the Roman Empire, with but little regard to his own dignity as a man of letters, about which he was so fond of talking, allowed himself to be carried down to the House in a fit of the gout, to vote for the preservation of the Board at which he himself sat, and of which he has himself admitted the duties to have been merely nominal.† As soon as the clause was read, Mr. Eden, one of the Commissioners at the Board, rose, and with much solemnity lectured Burke for speaking epigrams on the death of Lord Suffolk. He then quoted some passages from the *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, as implying that the very influence the author wished to diminish was really beneficial, and blamed him for neglecting information which had been voluntarily offered on the whole history of the Board of Trade, and which Mr. Eden gravely assured the House was contained in two thousand three hundred folio volumes.

Burke thanked Mr. Eden for the history he had given of the origin and efficiency of the Board. That information he would gratefully accept, but the two thousand three hundred volumes in folio he begged to be excused

* Burke's *Collected Speeches*, vol. ii. pp. 120-126. *Annual Register*, 780, p. 144.

† *Miscellaneous Works*, vol. i. p. 156.

from taking. In a strain of the most merciless ridicule he commented on this unlucky offer of the two thousand three hundred volumes in folio, until the whole House roared with laughter, and the Lords of Trades themselves were covered with confusion. He then turned to the individual authors who had been made Commissioners, and the historical Gibbon, the poetical Lord Carlisle, the juridical Mr. Eden, and the philosophical Soame Jenyns, were separately rendered ludicrous by the most playful and happiest allusions. Soame Jenyns was best known by his absurd *Essay on the Origin of Evil*, that Johnson had so ably reviewed. Burke gently intimated, that the title of the *Essay* might have been suggested by the Board at which the author sat, and that there unquestionably he had gained his great experience on the subject; for he must have known that the unconstitutional influence of the Crown in the House of Commons was one of the greatest of political evils, and in fact the aggregate of them all. The Board prevented such gifted gentlemen from writing by making them too rich. It was an hospital for the maintenance of veteran authors, not upon half but upon full pay. Like a picture which he remembered to have seen in Quarles' *Emblems*, they sat immured in a skeleton which barred their genius from taking its natural flight. They were like nightingales imprisoned in a crow's nest. He would set them free that they might sing more delightfully. "As an Academy of Literature, I honour them; but as a Board of Trade, I wish to abolish them." So glaring, indeed, was the abuse he endeavoured to reform, and so powerful and keen his eloquence and satire in answering, in two different speeches, every argument that was put forward by the defence, that at last the troops of the Govern-

ment gave way. One hundred and ninety were all that Ministerial influence could collect for the division, while the Opposition counted two hundred and seven. It was known at a quarter past two in the morning that Lord North's Administration had received its first great defeat by a majority of eight.

Alarmed at this result, before the Bill was again debated, every artifice was employed by the Court to induce the country gentlemen to return to the royal standard. The fifth clause was the first which directly reformed the household; it undertook to abolish the offices of the subordinate treasuries. Other places of a similar description were to be taken in succession. It soon became known that more than fifty members who had joined the Opposition in the division against the Board of Trade, had scruples about advancing under Burke's leadership to storm the precincts of the palace. The proposal to contract by the head for the royal tables, was much disliked. Men who were called moderate, shook their heads and looked aghast at the temerity which undertook to interfere with what were called the domestic arrangements of the Sovereign. Sensible of the disadvantages under which this clause was to be fought, Burke divided it into separate members, and though much against his will, gave up the arrangement for providing the royal tables by contract. The courtiers declaimed loudly against Parliament interfering in any manner with the management of the household. Burke declared that, from the tone of the debate, this would probably be the last time he would address the House on the subject of the Bill; that he regarded a regulation of the expenditure of the household as the pith and marrow of the plan; and that if he were beaten on it, it would scarcely be

worth while to submit the other clauses to a decision of the committee. The division was taken on the first member of the clause, proposing to abolish the Treasurer of the Chamber. The numbers were one hundred and fifty-eight for the Opposition, and two hundred and eleven for the Ministry.

Defeated by a majority of fifty-three, on this cardinal point of his economical scheme, Burke then declared himself utterly indifferent to what became of the Bill. Fox, however, earnestly entreated him to persevere, even though they gained nothing more than they had already won in abolishing the Board of Trade; for as he had no doubt, he said, that his friend intended to renew the measure session after session, they would have at least eight enemies of the people less to fight. Burke acquiesced in Fox's representations. He felt himself, however, completely defeated; and, before the close of the session, it was seen that he judged more correctly than his ardent associate.*

The Easter holidays were now approaching. He might anxiously pine for a little rest. The day after this defeat, however, both he and Fox warmly assailed Lord North, for having openly threatened to dissolve the East India Company, by moving that the Speaker should give them the three years' notice, according to Act of Parliament, because, as the time for the renewal of their Charter was again drawing near, the Directors had not come to satisfactory terms with the Government. This was but the old policy, which Burke had formerly so much censured, of intimidating the Company into making a bargain, pecuniarily advantageous to the Crown, by the menace of spoliation. Such a proposal, he now

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 339.

said, was more worthy of revellers intoxicated by liquor, than of statesmen in a sober senate. Nothing could be more wretched than to treat with the East India Company as with an enemy, and to regard every shilling wrenched from their coffers as a gain to the public. In his pursuit of a visionary revenue, the Minister had already lost thirteen Colonies, and he appeared ready to throw the East after the West. Burke became so vehemently indignant, that he was scarcely able to proceed ; and he asked pardon of the House for having allowed himself to be betrayed into warmth against a motion so alarming that it was scarcely possible to speak of it with moderation. He moved the previous question ; but the Government had a large majority.

The immense labour of the session had overtired his sensitive temperament. He went down to Beaconsfield, excited and fatigued. Hard work always rendered him unable to sleep at nights ; and he found himself so ill at the beginning of the Easter vacation, that he was obliged to discontinue all political labours, to postpone writing even private letters to his friends at Bristol on the business of the session, and to spend several days in absolute idleness. This complete repose, combined with the invigorating air of the forest and the farm, then glancing in all the fresh luxuriance of the early spring, restored him, by the fourth of April, to his usual robust health and exuberant spirits.*

The next day he returned to town. A duel had been recently fought between Lord Shelburne and Mr. Fullarton, a Scotchman, whom the Government had taken from the desk and placed at the head of a regiment. This gentleman had challenged the Peer for

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 335.

calling him a clerk, in a debate; and as this was the second duel which had arisen, during the session, from words spoken in Parliament, it was strongly condemned. Some persons went so far as to accuse the Court of encouraging their Scotch favourites to shoot the leaders of the Opposition. The last words Burke spoke in Parliament, before Easter, were, on the day of the occurrence, to defend Lord Shelburne; and, the subject being renewed on the day he again entered the House, he again spoke for the Earl, and stigmatized the growing practice of fighting duels for words spoken in Parliament, as utterly destructive of the freedom of debate. But he carefully guarded himself from being supposed to join in the violent prejudices against the Scotch, who, ever since the days of Lord Bute's favouritism, had been so obnoxious to the opponents of the Court. "I detest," said he, "all general imputations, all marked partialities, all determined proscriptions. We ought to be united in heart and affection as well as in interest, and to have but one common individual claim to favour. I should be as great an enemy to an Irish partiality, or to a Southern partiality, as I am to a Scotch partiality."*

At this time, the Rockingham and Shelburne parties were on better terms than they had ever been since the death of Chatham. It was understood that, on the accession of the Opposition to office, Lord Shelburne would not insist on the pretension he had somewhat unwarantly put forward of being First Lord of the Treasury, instead of Lord Rockingham; and in these various economical debates, the members of the two political connections had given each other a mutual, an earnest, and an effective support. Conscious of the favour Burke had

* Parl. Hist., vol. xxi. p. 338.

acquired to himself and his friends by the ability and success with which he had propounded his system of retrenchment, Lord Shelburne's more immediate followers, Barré and Dunning, were more than ever powerfully incited to exert themselves in this very popular cause. Earlier in the session, they had made, unsuccessfully, two important motions on the subject; but their greatest effort was reserved for the day after the debate on Colonel Fullarton's regiment. The result rendered the sixth of April in this year ever memorable in our political annals.

That day was appointed to consider the petitions for economical reform. A large meeting of the electors of Westminster was held in Westminster Hall. Fox, accompanied by his Whig friends the Dukes of Portland and Devonshire, attended, and vehemently harangued the people, who, it was mutually determined, should, at the next election, become his constituents. The Government, affecting alarm, had the third regiment of Guards, which was so obnoxious for its achievements in St. George's Fields twelve years ago, drawn up within sight of the meeting, that was only intended to enforce peaceably attention to the petitions for economy. They had accumulated to the number of forty, and, being signed by a large proportion of the people, seemed to bury the table of the Speaker in immense rolls of parchment.* Dunning introduced the subject, that afternoon, in a speech to the House more than usually remarkable for the characteristics of his oratory, methodical arrangement of matter, force of reasoning, and perspicuity of language. These intellectual qualities he possessed in such an eminent degree, that they succeeded in enchain-

* Annual Register, 1780, p. 165.

ing the attention of hearers who were repelled by the meanness of his figure, the absolute ugliness of his face, the huskiness of his voice, the absence of all physical animation, and the preliminary notice of his intention to address the House that he always gave, by his frequent attempts to clear his throat from the phlegm with which his powers of utterance were habitually choked.* He subdued the respect of his audience, who listened with wonder at the display of his analytical subtlety; nor could their respect for the vigour of the mental powers of this little unprepossessing lawyer be diminished by the knowledge that he spent hours of his busiest days, when impatient attorneys were waiting to consult him, and an anxious Senate was looking with expectation for his appearance, in carefully adorning his insignificant form and admiringly contemplating his repulsive features in a looking-glass.†

This was the occasion of his greatest triumph. He entered into a complete history of Burke's economical Bills, and paid him the highest compliments for his scheme of reform, which he declared to be, for the labour and difficulty of the undertaking, the number and variety of the objects it embraced, the skill with which matters of such a heterogeneous and discordant nature had been combined and arranged, and the uncommon zeal, unrivalled industry, and invincible perseverance with which it had been prosecuted, deserving to rank among the most supreme efforts of human genius. But how came it, he asked, that a plan which had at first been received with universal applause, had been permitted to be let down softly, until it was evident that it

* Wraxall's Historical Memoirs, vol. ii. p. 283.

† Ibid., vol. ii. p. 285.

had been all but formally rejected? This indirect defeat could only originate from influence. It could only originate from influence acting without the walls of the House. A motion for a Committee of Public Accounts, made by Colonel Barré; a proposal for the production of the Pension List, moved by Sir George Savile; and a Bill for the Exclusion of Contractors, brought in by Sir Philip Jennings Clerk, had, somehow or other, also as completely failed. All that had been obtained by the pile of parchment on the table, containing the sentiments and the prayers of so many thousand electors, and as the consequence of so much discussion, so many gigantic efforts, and so many heroic struggles, was the single clause of the Establishment Bill, abolishing the Board of Trade. He would therefore bring the question at once to an immediate issue, by moving two short and simple propositions, which must either be affirmed or denied. Dunning then proposed the celebrated resolution, “That the influence of the Crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished.”

It expressed in a single sentence the moral of nearly all Burke’s political history up to that hour. It pointed at once to the gigantic obstacle against which all his eloquence, wisdom, and patriotism had struggled in vain.

Dunning was repeatedly called upon by the Ministers to say what further resolutions he intended to engraft on this emphatic proposition. Lord North once more disclaimed all ambition, and was once more pathetically humble. The Lord Advocate, Dundas, hoped, that by making the resolution still stronger, it would the more certainly be rejected; he therefore proposed that the words, “It is now necessary to declare,” should be prefixed to the motion. The Opposition promptly agreed

to the amendment. Feeling that he had given irreparable offence to the Court by the patriotic speech which he had made to the King in communicating to him the addition to the Civil List, and indignant that Lord North had repudiated a bargain agreed to by his predecessor, the Duke of Grafton, about a chief-justice-ship, the Speaker boldly supported the resolution, and earnestly reminded Members of the account they would have shortly to give to their constituents. The fear of popular indignation, and the prejudices of the country gentlemen in favour of economy, prevailed. In a crowded House this great resolution was carried by a majority of thirteen; and though the Tory landowners were regarded as steady supporters of the Court, this division, so remarkable in other respects, was also not less significant from the fact of there being only nine County Members who voted in the Ministerial minority.

This was however not the only success of the evening. Dunning moved a second resolution, declaratory of the competence of the House to inquire into the abuses of the Civil List and every portion of the public expenditure. Against the entreaties of the Prime Minister for delay, it was carried without a division. Another resolution, proposed by Mr. Thomas Pitt, and pledging the House to afford, as far as possible, speedy and effectual redress to the grievances of which the petitions complained, was received with similar approbation. Conscious that it was necessary to strike before the temper of the House had time to cool, Fox then moved that the resolutions should be immediately reported. Lord North, defeated so decisively and repeatedly, taunted with the loss of America, assailed with reproach upon reproach, and held up as the indisputable proof of that influence against which the

House had at last plainly declared itself, fairly lost all command of himself, and gave way to outbreaks of passion. But he implored, he menaced, he stormed in vain. The resolutions were separately brought up, read a first and a second time, and, without a division, finally confirmed.

The joy of the public out-of-doors was unbounded. The names of all who voted with the Opposition were published extensively in the newspapers. Resolutions thanking them for what they had done, were generally voted at the county meetings. The system of Court appeared to have received its death-blow.

But the end was not yet come. Four days afterwards, the consideration of the petitions being resumed, Dunning proposed a resolution for exact accounts to be laid annually before the Legislature, of all sums of money paid out of the Civil List, or any other public fund, to Members of Parliament. Finding himself again successful, he brought forward another resolution, to remedy indirectly the defeat Burke had sustained in his attempt to reform the Household, by proposing that the holders of the offices which would have been abolished by the clause in the Establishment Bill, should be disqualified from sitting in the House of Commons. Dundas opposed the resolution for the Government. After making several elaborate objections to the proposition, he read long extracts from Burke's *Thoughts on the Causes of the Present Discontents*, as in favour of this influence; and concluded with severely blaming Dunning for taking the House by surprise with moving such extensive and important disqualifications. Burke rose, and observed that the Lord Advocate's emotions of surprise were of a some-

* *Annual Register, 1780, p. 172.*

what extraordinary nature. His surprise was preparation. An invisible agent had conveyed into his pocket some very long written quotations, which he thought convenient and applicable against the motion. Burke begged to say, for the author alluded to, that circumstances in ten years had greatly changed ; that, since the American war, other remedies, which were not formerly thought of, might be desirable ; but that he needed not this excuse : that author's sentiments were now exactly what they were when he wrote the book. His objections to a Place Bill, and to disqualifying the military profession from the House of Commons, in no respect applied to a measure disqualifying Members of the Household retained for the especial purpose of courtly influence. The clause in the Establishment Bill would have effected the object in a better manner ; but since that had been rejected, he could not be charged with inconsistency in supporting a proposition which would in some respects redeem that overthrow.* After a long debate, Lord North found himself in his third minority. He was defeated ; but only by a majority of two.

He seemed to be recovering ground. The small majority could, under the circumstances, be no cause for boasting to the victorious Opposition. On the thirteenth they were even defeated on the second reading of a Bill disfranchising revenue officers from voting at elections. The next day all business was suspended, by the sudden illness of the Speaker, and the House adjourned until the twenty-fourth. Administration industriously profited by this fortunate interval. The waverers were admonished. Royal blandishments were effectually employed. No exertion was spared to bring the mutinous country

* *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xxi. p. 338.

gentlemen back to the standard of the Government. As soon as the House sat again, it was evident that with many Members who had recently voted against the Court, the ardour for economy had considerably cooled.

Dunning proposed a motion which had been postponed on account of the Speaker's indisposition. It was to request his Majesty neither to dissolve nor prorogue Parliament until proper measures had been taken to diminish the influence of the Crown, and to correct the other evils of which the people had complained in their petitions. It was rejected by two hundred and fifty to two hundred and three. Burke and Fox found to their vexation that the Court had regained a majority of forty-seven.

An extraordinary scene ensued. Almost choking with rage, Fox rose to comment on this summary defeat. The chastisement he was about to inflict upon the deserters from the Opposition being anticipated, they attempted by loud outcries to prevent him from speaking. Foaming at the mouth, and almost shrieking at the highest pitch of his voice, he succeeded however in delivering himself of a torrent of invective such as Demosthenes might have envied, against those who had voted for the abstract resolution of the sixth of April, and who shamefully refused to support the only measures which could practically give it effect. Base, unmanly, treacherous, such were the epithets which the orator fulminated at the heads of his adversaries; and this kind of language began to be employed generally on both sides by heated opponents, as the divisions became close, and the two great parties joined in the grapple for life or death.

Burke, when in his vehement moods, was not behind his younger friend in the strength of his expressions. During a debate on the conduct of the Government in

attempting to overawe the recent meeting in Westminster Hall by the presence of the Guards, he called the Middlesex magistrates mere vermin, and the scum of the earth.* It does not, indeed, appear that the character of the persons who then filled the bench of justice in the neighbourhood of Court and Parliament, had improved since they had first fallen under his lash.† But however just may have been the plain words which both he and Fox applied to incapable magistrates and vacillating Members of Parliament, it was impossible for them to conceal from themselves or from others that the spirit which had carried the resolutions of the sixth of April was on the ebb.

This became very evident four days after Dunning's last motion, when Burke's Establishment Bill was, after having been suspended for some time, again considered in committee. The clause abolishing the office of the Great Wardrobe, and its attendant satellites, was supported with all the author's brilliancy and humour. His playful fancy appeared to delight in sporting itself among the antiquated encumbrances of his Majesty's household. No gravity could resist these mirthful sallies. He had determined, he said, not to meddle with the list of housekeepers, because he thought that there ought to be some respectable places for women of quality, and had supposed that they were all held by ladies. But, among other communications of the kind, he had received a letter from Haverfordwest, begging him not to interfere with these arrangements, because John Manners, Esq., was the royal housekeeper at Whitehall. He supposed this really to mean Joan Manners, or Lady John Manners; but on referring to the Red-book, and brushing

* Parl. Hist., vol. xxi. p. 554.

† See Vol. I. p. 310.

aside the crowd of hoop petticoats which hid him from sight, there he espied John Manners, Esq. He then went down to Whitehall, but saw neither the accommodations for a royal retinue, nor even a royal housekeeper; he only beheld in the banqueting-chamber several nude pictures, and a painter in the modern style industriously engaged in improving the works of the great masters.*

The office of the Great Wardrobe had however its champion. Mr. Gilbert, an official, gravely remonstrated against the indelicacy of such abolitions, and enumerated in succession the important duties which were performed by that department. The veteran Earl Nugent even compared Burke's proposed reforms to his own instance of the modern artist audaciously retouching the creations of the old masters. Burke replied, that the necessity of the times, and not his own inclination, had made him an administrative reformer. He was only an arras-mender, whose duty it was, in the Royal household, to take care of the tapestry hangings, and prevent them from being nibbled away by the teeth of rats and other noxious animals that sheltered themselves behind the august but tattered folds. He then commented, amid roars of laughter, and in what is described as the richest vein of ridicule, on Mr. Gilbert's solemn statement of the various duties of the Great Wardrobe, and which he rendered quite as ludicrous as Mr. Eden's specification of the two thousand three hundred folio volumes.†

But his wit could not change the fortune of the day. The clause was defeated by a majority of forty-eight. Later in the same evening, on the next clause, sweeping away the Board of Works, he was equally forcible in argument, lively in illustration, and pleasant in manner; and

* Parl. Hist., vol. xxi. p. 538.

† Ibid., p. 541.

still more unsuccessful on the division. Administration obtained the now extraordinary majority of eighty-five. Burke was prepared for the result. As he considered the fate of the Bill determined in the first division on the Household before Easter, he had reconciled himself to the defeat of the remaining clauses, and therefore saw even with cheerfulness the performance of this disagreeable operation. It was the general opinion of all who were present at the debates of this night, that the more amiable and genial features of his character had not for many years been so delightfully displayed.*

Not one of the other clauses was carried. Some of them were defeated by majorities of two to one. But, fearing to provoke the petitioners by a speedy rejection of the whole measure, Lord North, contrary to Burke's entreaties, kept the committee open until the end of the session, when he moved the previous question to that of reporting proceedings, and the Bill was totally lost.†

This unfortunate issue was not merely the work of Ministerial artifice. Many of the people had by their own imprudence contributed to their defeat. As soon as the delegates from the different counties met in London, instead of confining themselves to the object of their mission, they began to adopt wild popular schemes of political reform, altogether different and in some degree opposed to the mere administrative reform they had been chosen to promote. They lost sight of the practical, in pursuit of the impracticable. Universal suffrage, and annual Parliaments, became the favourite objects of the more extreme politicians of the class; and even the more moderate declared themselves strongly in favour of a project which Lord Chatham had first mooted, of adding

* Political Magazine, vol. i. p. 473. † Parl. Hist, vol. xxi. p. 714.

a hundred Members to the representation of the different counties, and for the immediate return to the old system of triennial elections. Timid men became alarmed at such indications, and began to look with some distrust even at the mere economical reforms of which they had at first approved. The cautious and scrupulous were disgusted. The most sagacious statesman then living saw many difficulties and dangers which the vulgar theorist never took into calculation.

Burke had been at the head of the movement for economical reform. To the agitation for political reform he became decidedly averse. As this is the time when this new feature may be first beheld diversifying the aspect of English political life, so it is the time when Burke's antagonism to this boisterous current first peculiarly distinguishes his political history, and alters his relative position among the leaders of Opposition. He communicated his sentiments on political reform during this April, in a letter to the Chairman of the Buckinghamshire meeting. The most far-sighted of politicians candidly confessed, that in this novel course he did not see his way. To his friend and constituent of Bristol, Mr. Joseph Harford, who had forgiven him for his conduct on the Irish commercial propositions, he was equally frank. He was far however from thinking that, if ever the desire for a change in the representation became general, it ought to be pertinaciously resisted by the Government, or by a fictitious majority of the House of Commons. "It would," he said, "be a dreadful thing, if there were any power, in this country, of strength enough to oppose with effect the general wishes of the people." *

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 340.

The democratic spirit which had, from extraneous sources, been infused into the Opposition, rendered at this time a motion that Alderman Sawbridge had for some years been accustomed to propose, more than ordinarily interesting. Hitherto Fox had been opposed to this proposition ; but obedient to the more popular influences of the season, he now both spoke and voted for shortening the duration of Parliaments. Hitherto regarding the question as scarcely serious, Burke, though he had most decided objections to it, and had clearly expressed them in his pamphlet on the Present Discontents, had generally taken no part in the annual discussion on the subject. Alluding to the Statute of Edward III., which provided for the frequent assembling of the Legislature, and which quaintly enacted, that "a Parliament shall be holden every year once, and more often if need be,"—"I am," he would say jestingly, "of the most advanced and most orthodox school of reformers. I am one of the Oftener-if-need-bes." He felt however that the time had now come, when so prominent a politician should boldly declare himself against a scheme he regarded as most pernicious. His speech was singularly eloquent, powerful, and convincing. That, while it would enormously increase the expense of elections, and consequently establish a heavy drain upon the private fortunes of the independent portion of the nation, and that, while it would in no respect provide against the grossest corruption of the lower classes of electors, it could not even subject Parliament to the stricter control of the more intelligent and public-spirited portion of the community, were arguments which he urged with all the earnestness of his nature, against the adoption of this popular proposition. His notes of this oration have been published. They

forcibly contributed, even with the liberal party, and in a reformed Parliament, to bring this specious remedy into disrepute.*

But Burke was not legislating in a reformed Parliament. Neither, though this is a consideration frequently forgotten by those who, judging all ages by their own, dogmatically pronounce themselves against his opinions, were the manners and morals of that time in any respect reformed. Both electors and elected were still grossly corrupt. The riot and debauch of every general election were frightful. On the question of religious toleration and social reform, it must be acknowledged that the most servile courtiers had much more liberal and enlarged notions, than the most honest electors on the side of the country party. Even the most sturdy Whig tradesmen in the great towns were so utterly ignorant, that they were seldom able to estimate the merits of any legislative measure.

Lord Beauchamp brought in a wise and humane Bill to remedy some of the grossest abuses in the laws affecting debtors. The power of the creditor was theoretically so immense, that the imagination fears to comprehend its magnitude. Every man being presumed solvent, he was incarcerated on the supposition that he refused to pay; and a legal fiction was thus made the excuse of perpetual wrong. The prisons became so full of unfortunate debtors, that, about twice in every Parliament, Government was obliged to have recourse to the clumsy expedient of a general gaol-delivery; when of course the thoughtless and the fraudulent, the mere imprudent and the deliberately dishonest were all alike again set free on society. Lord Beauchamp proposed to reform this

* Collected Speeches, vol. ii. p. 160.

civil process by doing regularly, and according to the circumstances of each particular case, what was done every three years most irregularly and most arbitrarily. Burke highly complimented the author of the measure, and warmly gave it his support. He only blamed it for not going far enough, and considered that an honest debtor, after fairly giving up his goods to his creditor, ought no longer to remain liable.* But his keen constituents, who were always buying and selling, thought the Bill went much too far, and, enraged with their Member, sent up a petition couched in sentiments exactly the reverse of those he had expressed. The tradesmen of Westminster were equally illiberal; and Fox, for supporting the Bill, ran a similar though not equal risk of losing the favour of the electors at the approaching dissolution.

The shopmen behind their counters were however only ignorant: the lower populace were not only ignorant, but absolutely brutal. One morning, shortly after Easter, two miserable wretches stood in the pillory on St. Margaret's-hill, Southwark, for crimes abhorrent to nature. One of them happened to be so short in stature that his head could barely reach the hole in which it was to be fastened. It was however pulled through. The man appeared to hang rather than to walk, as the pillory turned round. With tears in his eyes, he had supplicated mercy of the people who surrounded the instrument of punishment, eager to vent their indignation. But they were merciless. Though his sufferings were evidently most acute, though his face became black, and the blood spouted from his eyes, nostrils, and ears, they pelted him with so much fury that the officers were compelled to interpose.

* Parl. Hist., vol. xx. p. 1404.

This interference came too late. As the pillory was opened, the unfortunate man dropped lifeless on the stand.

On reading the account of this horrible occurrence in the newspapers, Burke's blood ran cold. Stimulated by that intense abhorrence of all cruelty which was at the foundation of his moral being, he immediately brought the subject before the House of Commons. He observed, that although the civil laws principally came under the consideration of Parliament, the criminal enactments most deserved their care, because the one only affected property, the other life; that the punishment ought neither to exceed the offence, nor, instead of being a preventive to the crime, be made a torture to the criminal; and that by passing measures unnecessarily cruel, they really obliged the Sovereign to break the solemn vow he had taken at his coronation, to temper justice with mercy. After relating the circumstances as they have been stated, he declared the punishment of the pillory had always appeared to him one of ignominy rather than of severity; but, that since it was liable to become an instrument of murder, it ought at once to be abolished; and he strongly expressed both detestation of the crime for which the poor man had been convicted, and pity for the sufferings under which he had expired. The Attorney-General, Wedderburne, said, "The honourable Member has narrated this lamentable affair with all those striking features of humanity which characterize his conduct on every occasion." He assured Burke that the case should be thoroughly inquired into, and the sentiments he had avowed receive every attention from the law officers of the Crown.*

* Parl. Hist., vol. xxi. p. 388.

After this debate had been published, a singular commentary was made upon it, which is as significant of the intelligence of the public instructors, as the murder itself, and Burke's indignant reprobation of the deed, were characteristic of himself and of the humbler inhabitants of Southwark. One of the morning papers, instead of applauding his humanity, chose to insert against him, on two succeeding days, the most disgusting imputations. Though so true a friend to the freedom of the press, he felt that such scandalous allusions deserved punishment. His friend John Lee applied to the King's Bench for an information against the editor of the newspaper. A rule was granted; but on an apology being made, the action was not pressed.*

While almost oppressed by business of so many different kinds, he learned that Shackleton was about to pay him a visit. The retired schoolmaster wrote, that when the May Meetings were over, he hoped to see Burke at Beaconsfield, mentioned something about the probability of bringing a friend with him, and enclosed a poem on Ballitore, which his daughter had just composed. Burke cordially anticipated the pleasure of meeting Shackleton. "My moments of rest," the statesman answered, "are not always moments of quiet. I do not know anything which would tend to make me forget all the disagreeable things that pass, so much as a few calm moments with you at Beaconsfield; and though I should be happy in seeing any friend of yours, I think we should be rather more at home with yourself; but that shall be according to your pleasure." Burke concluded his letter with a criticism on the poem that had been sent for his perusal and had recalled the beautiful scenery amid which his school-

* See Chronicle of the Annual Register, 1780, pp. 207, 214.

days were so happily spent; and it is delightful to observe, amid all his multifarious occupations, poetry once more being the topic on which he writes to Shackleton with similar ardour, as when, more than a quarter of a century before, he was a student of Trinity, in Dublin.*

He was making some of the last efforts for his Establishment Bill when he was informed of the hour that Shackleton would arrive. Immediately after the clauses had been rejected, he forgot all his vexations as he hurried up to Charles-street, St. James's-square, where he then had his house in town, and where he and all the members of the family awaited his friend. The next day, he carried Shackleton down to Beaconsfield, and they, as he had wished, passed a few happy hours quietly together.†

Richard had never before seen Burke's residence. The colonnades, the portico, and the statues, the greenhouse, the gardens, and the woods, all astonished the humble schoolmaster. He stared first round the magnificent place, and then at his friend, and thought them both "sublime and beautiful indeed." He slept that night in the mansion, and on the next morning, unknown to Burke, Richard was at an early hour on his knees, offering up many fervent prayers for this illustrious friend, who had been his companion in their early years; who had received him with so much affectionate tenderness; who, amid the most arduous political conflicts, with the admiration of England and America, and with the reasonable expectation of soon attaining the highest civil honours, retained so much of the sincerity and simplicity of boyhood; and thus, while playing so great a

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 346.

† Ibid., vol. ii. p. 349.

part in the world, continued almost unspotted by the world.*

If the simple and earnest Quaker had had any warning of the dangers which then impended over Burke, his supplications might have been even still more energetic. Shackleton, after parting feelingly from him, had only reached Bristol on his way homeward, when he learned that incendiary fires were blazing throughout London ; that the metropolis of the greatest empire of the civilized world had been for some days abandoned to a frantic and ignorant populace ; that his friend's life had been threatened; and that, as he trusted, by care of the Divine Providence, whose protection Richard had so devoutly invoked, Burke had been saved from all harm.†

* Shackleton's letter to his wife, from Burke's country-house, on this occasion, is most characteristic and curious.

“ Butler's Court, near Beaconsfield,
“ 25th of 5th month, 1780.

“ The yearly meeting being over, I went to see Edmund Burke. Having given him notice of my intended visit, he had come from the House of Commons, and was ready with his family to receive me. The friendship, the freedom, the cordiality with which he and his embraced me, was rather more than might be expected from long love. I could not well avoid coming with him to this place, which is most beautiful, on a very large scale ; the house, furniture, ornaments, conveniences—all in a grand style. Six hundred acres of land, woods, pleasure-grounds, gardens, greenhouses, etc. For my part, I stand astonished at the man and at his place of abode ; a striking parallel may be drawn between them ; they are sublime and beautiful indeed.

“ I woke early this morning, as usual, and was glad to find no condemnation ; but, on the contrary, ability to put up fervent petitions with much tenderness, on behalf of this great luminary.

“ Dr. Fothergill moved, to my great satisfaction, to have the yearly meeting stationary, and not regulated by the anniversary of a movable feast. It is to be taken into consideration at the next sitting of that great and solemn assembly.”—Memoirs and Letters of Richard and Elizabeth Shackleton, p. 102.

† Writing again to his wife, from Bristol, Shackleton observes :—

On the day when the two friends were tranquilly enjoying themselves at Beaconsfield, Lord George Gordon gave notice in the House of Commons, that, on the second of June, he would have the honour of presenting an important petition. He assured the Representatives and the Government, that the members of the Protestant Association of London, Westminster, and Southwark, would assemble in St. George's Fields, and accompany him loyally and peacefully in bringing down the petition to Parliament. The Scotch Association had intimidated the Government from granting any relief to the Catholics. Lord George Gordon was evidently about to attempt, in a similar manner, to overawe the British Legislature, that the Parliament might precipitately repeal the law which had been passed two years before, and against which this noble President of both the English and Scotch Associations was never tired of frantically declaiming. That there might be no mistake of what his intention really was, he publicly announced, at a meeting in Coachmakers' Hall, that unless twenty thousand people assembled to go with him to Westminster, he would not present the petition. The Government had recently allowed the Guards to appear near a most respectable assembly of the electors of Westminster, presided over by great statesmen and noblemen

“There are dreadful accounts coming here daily from London, of an insurrection of many thousands of the populace; pulling down Romish chapels, and breaking open prisons, and doing great damage to the persons, houses, and furniture of individuals, nobility, gentry, etc. Our friend Edmund Burke, most happily (by the interposition, I trust, of Divine Providence) escaped out of their hands, for I suppose they had him awhile in their power. He pleaded his own cause with the mad multitude; and the Controller of all things so overruled their wicked, desperate, furious spirits, that they let him go unhurt.”—*Memoirs*, p. 103.

of the highest character, yet the Ministers appear to have looked at this meeting of the Protestants with absolute indifference, though they were principally of the lowest and most ignorant classes of the community, were called together for the express purpose of giving weight by their numbers to what they did not hope to make preponderate by reason, and were under the direction of an impulsive fanatic, who had, in his manners and conduct, recently exhibited many unmistakable symptoms of mental aberration. Not the slightest precaution had been taken either by magistrates or Secretaries of State, when, on that June morning, multitudes, from all parts of London, with blue cockades in their hats, flowed through every thoroughfare to the place of gathering.

The threat of their President had been effective. An imposing congregation, of sixty thousand persons, stood ready to proceed with him to the House of Commons. They crossed the different bridges in three bodies, marching in regular order. Confident in their numbers, at three o'clock in the afternoon, as the two Houses met, they filled Palace-yard and all the neighbourhood. The carriages of the Peers began to arrive, and then the first demonstrations of violence to be made. For supporting the Catholic Bill the Bishops were peculiarly obnoxious to the riotous Protestants. Dr. Markham's lawn sleeves were pulled off and thrown in his face. The Bishop of Lincoln's carriage was broken to pieces; and this Christian prelate was seen running, terrified, into the nearest house, whence he was glad to make his escape over the tiles. As both Lord Bathurst and Lord Mansfield found to their cost, the wigs of the lawyers fared little better than the lawn sleeves of the Bishops. Stormont and Hillsborough, the two Secretaries of State in

the House of Lords, were mobbed. The Duke of Northumberland, because he had a gentleman in black sitting by his side, whom the petitioners sagaciously supposed to be a Jesuit, was pulled out of his carriage, and robbed of his watch and purse. Yet, singularly enough, it was on this very evening, when these riotous multitudes were so clearly proving their unfitness for exercising political privileges, that the Duke of Richmond, notwithstanding the cautious remonstrances of Burke and his more moderate friends in Opposition, was moving some celebrated resolutions in favour of annual Parliaments and universal suffrage. His Grace was gravely arguing for an unlimited franchise, and absolute confidence in even the lowest classes of society, while the air was shaken by the roar of the mad multitude in Palace-yard, and the Peers were trembling on their seats, looking as pale as death, and bearing on their coats, robes, and wigs, the signs of the grossest popular violence, which was itself the lamentable result of the grossest popular ignorance. Lord Montfort rushed into the House. He informed the audience that one of their order, Lord Boston, had just been dragged from his coach, and was in danger of being killed. The Duke of Richmond's oration, in favour of universal suffrage, was brought to a close by one of the Peers proposing, that they should all sally out in a body and rescue their unfortunate brother from the clutches of these ignorant fanatics, whom sympathetic enthusiasm was speedily converting into madmen. No resolution had been come to when the unfortunate Peer himself appeared, having happily escaped, with his hair-powder over his clothes, and his hair hanging in confusion over his eyes. He had cunningly engaged his more violent assailants in a polemical dispute

on the identity of the Pope and Antichrist, and, in the midst of the controversy, managed to get away unobserved.

Charles Turner's carriage was also smashed. The Commons, not being however so conspicuous as the Peers, suffered not so much personal violence. Yet they ran much greater risk. Lord George Gordon, proud of his following, moved, that the petition should be immediately considered. The great majority determinedly refused to debate on the question under the pressure of the mob at their doors. One Member there was who, more than any other, exerted himself in support of this magnanimous resolution. One orator there was who, feeling that the great object of his life was at stake, spoke most earnestly for maintaining the dignity of the Legislature. One man there was who had the glorious obloquy of his name being publicly given out, to the blinded populace, by their leader, as the great opponent of concession to bigotry in arms. As the debate proceeded, Lord George went busily to and fro, informing the people in the lobbies what side the different speakers took, and who, in his opinion, were their friends, who their most decided enemies. From the top of the gallery stairs he harangued the crowds, and, telling them that there was little chance of their desire being complied with, delivered over, with sullen malignity, his ablest opponents to their vengeance. "Particularly," said he, "Mr. Burke, the Member for Bristol."*

Several Members had seen Lord George's conduct with great indignation. At last they felt themselves compelled to interfere. Conway remonstrated warmly

* See the Account of the Riots, in the Appendix to the Chronicle of the Annual Register for 1780, p. 258.

with the fanatic; some gentlemen called out to commit him to the Tower; one of his own relations threatened, in the event of a single one of the populace crossing the threshold, to run his sword through the noble Lord's body. The Guards at length arrived, and the lobbies were cleared, so as to permit the House to divide. Only seven Members supported Lord George; and the consideration of the Petition was deferred until Tuesday. As the two Houses adjourned, the people slowly left Palace-yard; but the worst incidents of the day were yet to come. The Catholic chapels of the Foreign Ambassadors, in Duke-street, Lincoln's-inn-fields, and in Warwick-street, Golden-square, were attacked, and almost burnt to the ground, before the soldiers arrived and the populace dispersed.

The next day was Saturday. The House of Lords met, and voted an address for the prosecution of the rioters. Some disturbances again broke out that evening in the vicinity of Moorfields; but the excitement appeared subsiding, and few people as yet entertained any serious apprehensions of more terrible disorders. In the same neighbourhood on the Sunday afternoon the gathering storm assumed a more menacing aspect. Mobs ran shouting about in all directions. Houses were gutted, and all their furniture thrown into the streets. Bonfires blazed with the wrecks of pulpits, pews, benches, and altars. Drunken fellows of the lowest class profanely danced about in the most gorgeous vestments of the priests, and waved in their hands the most sacred insignia of the Catholic religion.

On the Monday, if property and life were to be regarded as secure, there could be no mistake as to the necessity of energetic action. From Virginia-lane, in

Wapping, to Lord George Gordon's residence in Welbeck-street, the houses and chapels were abandoned to the fury of the most lawless of mankind. Yet the Government, as incapable in putting down a riot in the streets as it had been in subduing the American Colonies, took no decisive and effectual measures for restoring peace to the Capital. These disorders became systematic, and were evidently conducted by deliberate leaders. The houses of all the more energetic supporters of the cause of toleration were devoted to destruction. Sir George Savile, as the author of the Roman Catholic Relief Bill, was the first object of their animosity: his residence in Leicester-fields was broken open, and his furniture demolished. Burke and his wife were both out when, at nine o'clock in the evening, he learnt that his own humble roof in Charles-street was, after that of Sir George Savile, to be especially the mark for criminal outrage. He rushed home, to secure his more important papers. Shortly afterwards, a file of soldiers came and took possession of the house. For that night the quiet habitation was saved. The next day his books and furniture were removed, and he and Mrs. Burke went, for security, to reside at General Burgoyne's.*

It is amid such dangers that the real characters of people appear. Her house and furniture only preserved by military force, herself compelled to seek refuge under the hospitable roof of a friend, her husband pointed out by the noble leader of the Protestant Association to the furious fanatics as their most determined foe, the sky red with incendiary flames, and unchecked lawlessness dominating from one end of London to the other, never surely was the fortitude of a devoted wife put to a more severe

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 353.

trial than was then that of the calm, gentle, unpretending, undemonstrative Mrs. Burke. Through all this terrible time her conduct was worthy of herself and of the great man whose heart she possessed and whose name she bore. Her brother-in-law, Richard Burke, in that strain of affectionate admiration with which she was ever regarded by the whole family, wrote at the moment to one of their friends in Bristol, “Jane has the firmness and sweetness of an angel; but why do I say an angel? of a woman! O God! there are no men in the country.”*

There was at least one man. As was the wife, so was the husband. The day on which they sheltered themselves at Burgoyne’s was that appointed, on the preceding Friday, for considering the Protestant petition. To such a height had the riots arisen, and so well known was Burke as the opponent of all concession, that many of his friends were sensible of his life being actually in danger. They came to him, and earnestly besought him to leave town. But they little knew the spirit of the man for whom they had such friendly solicitude. He not only resolved to do his duty in the House of Commons, but, to show that he was not to be intimidated, actually walked directly through the crowds that filled the thoroughfares, with their usual badge the blue cockade in their hats, and with formidable bludgeons in their hands. He boldly told them his name, and acknowledged the part he had taken in support of Sir George Savile’s Bill. An English mob is not naturally cruel. It must be said to the credit even of these Gordon rioters that, furious and fanatic as they were, with the Metropolis for nearly a week in their possession, and the lives of so many thousands abandoned to their mercy,

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 351.

this national characteristic was most honourably maintained. No sanguinary scenes, such as other capitals in a state of anarchy have seen, were beheld at this time in London. Mischievous as these blinded multitudes were against property, they in general respected the lives of those who were most obnoxious to them; and, though acting in appearance so much like wild beasts, showed no ferocious thirst for human blood. In that strange assembly to which Burke fearlessly delivered himself up, some persons there may have been who had heard of his innumerable acts of kindness, and his philanthropic devotion to the cause of human improvement. There were many who, even through the intoxication of fanaticism, must have been struck with respect for him who ventured alone to brave their utmost fury. He had no reason to repent of his boldness. "I even found," he afterwards wrote, "friends and well-wishers among the blue cockades."*

On arriving near Westminster Hall, he found the whole area covered with soldiers. The sight of the populace ready for any outrage in the streets, and of the troops with fixed bayonets drawn up to preserve the freedom of debate, were equally painful to his feelings. His heart was filled with grief and shame. He vehemently blamed the Government for allowing the police discipline to be so relaxed, that even the Legislature itself could not be preserved from violence; and pathetically bewailed the condition of the times, when the advocates for liberty were establishing the most wretched slavery, when there was an armed soldiery and a bludgeoned mob at the gates. As the two hundred Members whom the orator

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 354. See also Parl. Hist., vol. xxi. p. 662.

addressed nearly all experienced similar sentiments, his speech was heard with great approbation. Never, in his own opinion, had he produced a greater effect. But he could not prevent his hearers from coming to one resolution, which he, under the circumstances, regarded as pusillanimous. It pledged the House to consider the petitions as soon as order should be restored.*

At that time there was but little prospect of order being restored. While the House was sitting, the residence of the Prime Minister in Downing-street was attacked. All the fierce and eager spirits, who ever lurk in the darkest recesses of great capitals, ready for any deeds of plunder and riot, felt that it was their hour, and rushed madly from their lairs into the light of day. Then appeared the savage and untutored barbarians, nurtured amid wealth and civilization, whose existence luxurious society complacently ignores, but from whose outrages, when, once in a century or two, they get the upper hand, luxurious society is the first to suffer. Respectable persons stared with wonder and alarm at the wild and grotesque visages that now assembled in the streets, coming none knew whence, and going, after they had done their devilish work, none knew whither.

The outrages became of the most desperate and determined character. The House of Commons had some reason for adjourning in alarm. Newgate was assailed, the prisoners set free, and the building burnt to the ground. The New Prison at Clerkenwell was also broken open ; the houses of three able magistrates were gutted ; and the violences of the night finally consummated by the deliberate destruction of the books, furniture, pictures,

* Parl. Hist., vol. xxi. p. 662. Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 354.

and papers of the great Chief Justice, Lord Mansfield, at his handsome private residence in Bloomsbury-square.

The next morning Dr. Johnson walked out to see the ruins of Newgate. A few fellows were coolly plundering the Sessions House at the Old Bailey, as though they were doing the most lawful daily business. Richard Burke beheld in Queen-street one boy mounted on a pent-house, zealously pulling down the building, and throwing the fragments to two other boys below, who were amusing themselves by making a bonfire of the spoil. He exclaimed indignantly, “Children are plundering at noonday the City of London!”* People might well ask where were the Ministers? What signs of existence were there of that expensive fiction, gravely regarded by Lord North and his friends as a Constitutional Government? Of government, indeed, in any form whatever, there had for four days been no real indications; and the great metropolis of the British Empire was abandoned to the mob.

The Prime Minister and his colleagues appeared quite helpless. The only person in high office who really felt deeply the humiliation, and the responsibility which attached to him, was the King. He felt by stern experience what it was to have Ministers only subservient to his own prepossessions: in this great extremity they dared not to take any vigorous resolution, and the Sovereign was left to his own resources. A Council was held, at which Lord Rockingham boldly appeared unasked, in undress, and with his hair in disorder.† The Marquis, never timid nor nervous on great occasions, strongly inveighed, in the presence of the King, against

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 351.

† Wraxall's Hist. Mem., vol. i. p. 354.

the criminal supineness of the Ministers. No castigation could be more justly deserved. George III., among whose many deficiencies a want of courage was certainly not one, at length himself saved the Capital from general conflagration and utter destruction, by signing, with the advice of Wedderburne, a warrant which commanded the troops to act decisively, with or without the presence of magistrates, with or without the expiration of the hour supposed to be legally allowed for the dispersal of a meeting after the reading of the Riot Act. Some writers have affirmed that it was the conduct of the Opposition in blaming the employment of the soldiers in St. George's-fields on the tenth of May, 1768, that now caused the Government to hesitate in using effectively the military power. But there is little wisdom in such an allegation. The most complete condemnation of Lord Weymouth's letter, and the conduct of the Lambeth magistrates, will be found in these Gordon riots; for it is in the very nature of extreme to produce extreme; and blood unjustly shed by Government on an inadequate occasion, will ever be found to weaken the most energetic means of necessary defence when the greatest emergency arrives. The Ministers themselves indeed confessed that on the earlier days of the riots, had they been ever so willing to use the troops, the force at hand was most insufficient. They made their culpable negligence an excuse for their apparent indifference.

But the intention of the rioters to attack the Bank and the public offices, at last roused even this Ministry to something like activity. On the Wednesday it was generally known that determined steps would be taken to restore tranquillity, and that there must inevitably be

a conflict between the troops then pouring into London from all directions, and the reckless populace that had for four days revelled without restraint in the wildest excesses. This was the most terrible day of all. The houses, with blue flags hanging from the windows, "No Popery" chalked upon their doors, and even the Jews legibly placarding on their shutters, "This house is a true Protestant," to deprecate the fury of the lawless multitude: such were the outward and visible signs which met the eyes in the streets of the most civilized capital in the world.

Twice the Bank was attacked. The Pay Office was also attempted. Three prisons, the King's Bench, the Fleet, and the Marshalsea, were forced; and from them all, the flames rose high into the sky. Nothing could exceed the horrors of that night. Thirty-six fires were counted blazing simultaneously. The cries of the insane crowds, at length checked in their mad career, and the regular platoon musketry of the soldiers who were gradually gaining the upper hand, the crackling of the flames, and the brilliant illumination which they produced, combined to form a scene that none who beheld it could ever obliterate from the memory. The warehouses of an eminent Roman Catholic distiller in Holborn, and at the end of Fleet Market, were destroyed, and the spirituous liquors both increased the intensity of the conflagration and the fury of the assailants; many intoxicated fellows rolled in the gutters, and some were even dying from having drunk unrectified spirits, which ran like water down the streets. Fortunately there was no wind stirring; and the stars of a summer's night looked down serenely upon all this fire and frenzy, bloodshed and death.

One little incident in this scene of tremendous agitation emerges with singular effect out of the darkness of the past. While from one of the burning distilleries on the north of the Fleet Market, a volume of fire arose which to the entranced spectators seemed a mighty volcano of flame, scorching St. Andrew's church, and brilliantly lighting up the figures and hands of the clock with the clearness of noonday ; while the streets were crowded with people, and many desperate eyes glared fearfully in the night, and were evidently meditating on their next exploit ; two gentlemen, standing by the wall of the church, observed a watchman pass by with his lantern in his hand, and, as though nothing extraordinary were going on, this stolid guardian of the public peace was calmly calling out the hour.*

At length the day broke. London, in the morning light of Thursday the 8th of June, had the appearance of a city just taken by storm. With the darkness however the danger had passed away, and the disturbances were at an end. The Metropolis continued under martial law. Cavalry and infantry occupied different squares and large streets. The House of Commons met only to adjourn. Lord George Gordon was on Friday committed on a charge of high treason to the Tower, and was conveyed to his place of confinement by the most numerous guard of soldiers ever known to attend a prisoner of State. For four nights Burke had, with other friends, sat up on watch at Lord Rockingham's and Sir George Savile's ; and the sight of their houses garrisoned by soldiers to protect them from the violence of people for whose rights they had long so patriotically contended, and whose welfare they had so long endeavoured to further in Parliament,

* Wraxall's Hist. Mem., vol. i. p. 338.

caused him many moments of bitter anguish. "Savile House, Rockingham House, Devonshire House, to be turned in garrisons! *O tempora!* We have all served our country for several years, some of us for near thirty, with fidelity, labour, and affection; and we are obliged to put ourselves under military protection for our houses and our persons."*

But on the following Monday, tranquillity being perfectly restored, his furniture was again taken to his own house. His wife, who had throughout the whole time acted with so much sweetness, resignation, nobleness, and courage, once more slept under her own roof; and Burke was able on the next day to write Shackleton an account of the fortunes of the household during the terrible week that was at last happily over.

As soon as peace was restored, this lamentable outbreak could be properly discussed in Parliament. The King opened the question on the nineteenth by a Speech from the Throne. It gave general satisfaction, and complimentary addresses of thanks were unanimously returned. Burke passionately declaimed against the deluded fanatics who had originated the riots, declared the Bill they wished to be repealed an act of the truest wisdom, and one which ought not to be interfered with at the dictatorial requisition of a lawless rabble.† As there was no probability of the petitions meeting with any but nominal support, he thought that the dignity of the Legislature would, after such occurrences, be best consulted by the Commons refusing to consider them at all; or by passing some very strong resolutions he himself drew up, asserting in unqualified language the general principle of religious liberty. But Lord North

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 355. † Parl. Hist., vol. xxi. p. 700.

and his colleagues could not come up to such a pitch of heroic constancy. The resolutions Burke privately submitted to them, indicated a comprehensive plan of toleration, which the Prime Minister confessed to go far beyond his ideas; and they were diluted by Lord North, and moved on the day after the House had again met, when the petitions were formally under consideration.*

Eight Members only supported the ignoble desire for intolerant retrogression. After one of these, Alderman Bull, the seconder of Lord George Gordon, had fiercely argued in favour of the petitions, Burke rose, and spoke with much eloquent fervour for three hours. He pathetically dwelt on the sufferings occasioned by the riots, and especially on the hard case of Mr. Langdale, the distiller, who, with twelve children to support, had had property to the amount of fifty thousand pounds wantonly destroyed. He keenly ridiculed the petition, and the proofs of ignorance which the signatures displayed; and scornfully reprobated the folly of those who, as their marks showed, were unable to write their own names, endeavouring to hinder the education of others. Remembering how much he owed to his old schoolmaster, Abraham Shackleton, he related the circumstances of his own education; how he had been brought up in the belief of the Church of England, by one who dissented from the doctrines of that Church; how, under him, he had been taught to read the Bible morning, noon, and night; and how much his own individual experience induced him, while holding fast by his own creed, to grant freedom of conscience and communicate the privileges on which he valued himself, to all the rest of mankind. He moved that a few prefatory words should be added

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 361.

to the first resolution, stating that much industry had been used to misrepresent the intentions of Parliament.*

The resolutions were carried ; and here the business ought properly to have ended. But even some of the most liberal and intelligent Members were, perhaps unknown to themselves, dismayed by the recent outbreak of popular fanaticism, and wishing to cultivate their electioneering interests, were desirous of, at least in appearance, humouring a spirit which while it was rampant they had loudly condemned. Sir George Savile, whose name was so honourably associated with the Catholic Relief Bill, encouraged the introduction of a Bill professedly for the better security of the Protestant religion, by restraining the Catholics from taking upon themselves the education of Protestant children, and in fact virtually preventing them from keeping boarding-schools or any academical establishments. A clause was even afterwards added prohibiting Catholic tradesmen from receiving Protestant apprentices. The measure was supported by Dunning and Barré, as the exponents of Lord Shelburne's policy, and also by Sir Joseph Mawbey and other popular patriots, who prided themselves on being much more advanced Liberals than Burke and his select Rockingham friends. Their sentiments, as the Bill was passing through committee, were singularly opposed to those of him whom they contemptuously considered as a most doubtful friend of political freedom. He declared himself sorry for the credulity and blindness of the age, and of the country in which he lived. He even ventured to express his regret that there were no Roman Catholic colleges in England, because it was better for men to be educated at home than in France, Flanders, and Spain. He gave

* Parl. Hist., vol. xxi. p. 709.

the House an account of the different Catholic schools, showed the most minute and extensive knowledge of the subject, pathetically displayed the injury the measure would inflict on some of the most honest and industrious persons in the community, and considered that the policy was very questionable of legislating at all on those matters at such a time.*

Such legislation was, in fact, encouraging the Protestant Associations. Many of the ringleaders thronged the lobby of the Commons during these discussions, and seemed rather proud than otherwise of the notoriety they had acquired. “I am astonished that those men can have the audacity still to nose Parliament,” said Burke one day in tones loud enough for them to hear, as he stalked indignantly into the House.*

The persecuted Catholics had then all his sympathies. As he was about to present a petition he had himself drawn up for some of the people whose occupations were struck at by Savile’s Bill, he discovered that there was some incorrectness in the language. “If we are not favourably received, at least let us be worthy of it,” he muttered to himself, and immediately took up a pen to correct the application. While writing hurriedly, and, with his energetic versatility, talking at the same time to Members and the petitioners who were crowding around him at the door, the Speaker imperiously called upon him to go on. Without looking up from the paper or laying down his pen, he, alluding to the fate which would inevitably attend the petition, said, with an expression half comic and half serious, “It is hard, Mr. Speaker, that you cannot wait even for a moment, ‘No, not to stay the grinding of the axe.’” But though playful in

* *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xxi. p. 718.

† *Bisset*, vol. ii. p. 73.

manner, he was more than usually earnest in reality. When the clause against the apprentices was carried, he indignantly declared that he would attend the Bill no further, and summarily walked out of the House.

It passed the Commons, and was sent up to the Lords. Burke then most assiduously applied to individual Peers, and exerted every influence he possessed to prevail upon them to throw out the measure. Walker, the author of the Pronouncing Dictionary and Elements of Elocution, had, in debating societies, talked himself into becoming a Catholic while persuading some of his hearers to become Presbyterians. His means of livelihood were directly struck at by the Bill. Young Richard Burke having been one of his pupils, Elocution Walker, as he was called, was personally known to Burke, who, while the measure was before the Lords, introduced him, with some characteristic observations, to a courageous nobleman, Lord Berkeley, celebrated in that day for his successful encounters with highwaymen. "Here, my Lord," Burke is reported to have said, "is Mr. Walker, whom not to know by name at least would argue want of knowledge of the harmonies, cadences, and proprieties of our language. Against this gentleman and others, we are going, my Lord, upon a poor and ungrounded prejudice of the refuse of the mob of London, to commit an act of gross injustice. And for what? For crimes moral or political? No, my Lord, but because we differ on the meaning affixed to a single word—*Tran-sub-stan-ti-a-tion!*!"

The injustice was however not committed. England was saved from that additional political disgrace. The Peers, with a much higher sense of Parliamentary dignity than had been evinced by the representatives of the

people, allowed the Bill to stand over until the time appointed for the prorogation. It was quietly but significantly defeated, without having received a direct negative.

Burke's representations had not been unavailing. But the humanity he showed to the Roman Catholics in this tremendous crisis was of course attributed by many of those sectarians who had studied the letter of Christianity without having the slightest notion of its charitable spirit, to a secret but very real sympathy with the professors of the more ancient creed. They revived all the old calumnies of Jesuitism and St. Omer. Yet at that very moment he was earnestly endeavouring to save from the gallows those miserable Protestant fanatics who had menaced his home and life, and had given London a prey at first to fire, and at last to the sword. The riots were over, and Parliament was up. The trials of the individuals who had been taken while at their work of destruction, were yet to come. Burke, at such a time, did not leave London permanently for Beaconsfield. His mind was full of apprehensions of a bloody assize. He was resolved, as far as his personal representations could extend, to save the judge's ermine from being crimsoned with blood unjustly, because indiscriminately and uselessly shed.

Wedderburne had just been elevated to the Chief Justiceship of the Common Pleas, and created a Peer under the title of Lord Loughborough. Burke took the opportunity of a congratulatory letter on these honours, to enter into the business of punishing the rioters, and anxiously endeavoured to impress on the mind of the new Judge care, selection, and system in the trials on which he was about to preside.* Such counsels had

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 356.

but little effect on the mind of the man whom he addressed. Lord Loughborough's speech to the Grand Jury, on opening the Special Commission in Surrey during this July, was most inflammatory, and utterly unworthy of the seat of justice.

All Burke's horror of cruelty burst forth. He drew up in succession the two papers of *Reflections on the Approaching Executions*, that are published among his works, and was desirous that they should be laid before the King. He sent them to the Lord Chancellor Thurlow. He sent them to the President of the Council, Lord Bathurst. He sent them to the Chief Justice of the King's Bench, Lord Mansfield. He sent them, through Sir Grey Cooper, the Secretary of the Treasury, to Lord North. He wrote many private letters on the subject, and throughout this correspondence, his dread of an unmerciful administration of justice betrays itself in every sentence. "For God's sake," he wrote to Cooper, "entreat of Lord North to take a view of the sum-total of the deaths, before any are ordered for execution; for by not doing something of this kind, people are decoyed in detail into severities they never would have dreamed of if they had had the whole in their view at once."*

He thought that six examples, made in different places and on the same day, would be bloodshed enough. The friends of the Protestant Association had advised the punishment of those who had plundered, and not those who had been merely rioters through fanaticism. Burke took just the opposite view. The ordinary administration of justice he considered quite sufficient for chastising ordinary crimes against property; they were

* *Works and Correspondence*, vol. vi.

the leaders who, under the pretence of religious zeal, having originated the outrages, ought to suffer the most severe penalties of the law. Those Reflections are singularly comprehensive, profound, and suggestive. The noble principle on which the criminal code has in this century been mercifully reformed, was never so beautifully and philosophically expressed as in two sentences by Burke in his *Thoughts on the Approaching Executions*. "Men," he observed, "who see their lives respected and thought of value by others, come to respect that gift of God themselves. To have compassion for oneself, or to care more or less for one's life, is a lesson to be learned, just as every other; and I believe it will be found that conspiracies have been most common and most desperate where their punishment has been most extensive and most severe."

Many lives were doubtless saved by his humane interposition. It cannot however be said that justice on these miserable offenders was very mercifully administered; and some scenes enough to soften the hardest heart were exhibited on the gallows.

Though these riots may be justly attributed to the incapacity of the Government, yet their effect was really favourable to the Administration. They discredited popular associations. They caused the waverers who had sided recently with the Opposition, to renounce their liberal professions, and once more rally round Lord North. The tendency to a reaction, which had been stimulated by the extreme theories of the Reformers, was therefore increased by the violence of the fanatics; and in the summer, the Ministers, after so many defeats and disgraces, found themselves stronger than they had any reason to expect. The prospect of the war, though

in reality more hopeless than ever, had to superficial observers a brighter appearance. Early in the year, Admiral Rodney, on his way to the West Indies, had fallen in with a Spanish fleet off Cape St. Vincent, and had gained a very decisive victory. Several important convoys belonging to France and Spain had been taken. The old national pride at vanquishing the Bourbons again revived, and people overlooked, or were inclined to underrate, indications of general hostility which were of the most serious nature.

Even the neutral nations were only neutral in name. With the exception of the Queen of Portugal, all the Potentates with whom we had hitherto been allied, from the Empress of Russia in the north, to the Emperor of Morocco in the south, were the real enemies of England. Russia had published a declaration, the principles of which she was resolved to maintain by force of arms, really striking, under the cloak of the neutral, at the maritime supremacy of England; and she invited the Courts of Copenhagen, Stockholm, and Lisbon, as well as their High Mightinesses at the Hague, to join her in her efforts to vindicate the freedom of the seas. The other Baltic Powers, Sweden and Denmark, at once joined Russia, in the armed assertion, that a flag of a neutral Power covers all the goods even of belligerents, except those which were admitted to be contraband of war. France and Spain heartily announced their adherence to the doctrine that free ships make free goods. England, not venturing to quarrel directly with the formidable armed neutrality of the Baltic, endeavoured, by menaces, to prevent Holland from joining the confederacy. The Dutch could scarcely be expected to sympathize with a war against the American Colonies, resembling

in so many particulars that which had called their Republic into existence; and a strong measure which the British Ministry took of revoking the stipulations of treaties, and placing Holland on a similar footing as other neutral nations, only depressed still further the English party at the Hague, encouraged the French, and drove the Power which had been so closely allied with Great Britain since the Revolution, into the ranks of her enemies, at a time when she so much required friends.

These foreign affairs were, however, but little understood by the people. Tidings arrived this August of some leading successes in America. An expedition had been operating in South Carolina under Sir H. Clinton and Lord Cornwallis; and England was all exultation on learning that, after a deliberate siege, Charleston, the capital of the province, had fallen under the Royal arms. Eager to profit by the favourable appearances of the moment, the Ministers came to a resolution. While many of their opponents were busily engaged in their duties as officers of militia in a large camp at Ranmer, near Dorking, the Government, on the first of September, unexpectedly dissolved Parliament. When this proclamation appeared in the Gazette, it found the Opposition quite unprepared, and, according to their own admission, came upon them like a clap of thunder.*

To Burke it was indeed the signal of a storm. He was still in town, negotiating with the Admiralty some local business of his constituents. He had received from different parts of the kingdom many addresses of thanks for his late exertions on economical reform, and many earnest requests to renew his labours in the next ses-

* Annual Register, 1781, p. 141.

sion. Few men had ever done so much as he during the six years he had represented Bristol. Every step in the American war he had steadily resisted. Every measure for promoting the peace, happiness, and union of the empire, he had earnestly supported. No private interests, no courtly allurements, had caused him to swerve in the slightest degree from the straight path of his duty. His last great efforts for a reform in the public expenditure had gained him universal applause, and placed him uncontestedly at the head of the Opposition. Yet, at this time, Bristol was far from appreciating the honour of having so distinguished a representative.

She considered him somewhat negligent in those respectful attentions which the most idle Member of Parliament can easily pay to his constituency, but which are sometimes very irksome to the most laborious of statesmen. He had not visited the city for four years. Though he was elected by the Whig interest, yet many of the Whigs in Bristol seem to have been anything rather than Liberals. They, like the electors of many other constituencies, considered it almost high treason in their representative to disobey their positive instructions ; and though Burke, at the very moment of his election, had protested against the binding nature of such declarations, this lesson appears to have been thrown away. He had acted directly in opposition to the communications that had been sent him on the Irish Trade Bills ; and though years had passed since these free-trade measures had been first proposed, his decided championship of them had not been forgotten. Bristol had also, in the last session, petitioned against Lord Beauchamp's Debtors Bill ; her eloquent Member had however supported it ; and it was even said, though most falsely,

that he had treated her petition with contempt in presenting it to the House of Commons. On the Bill granting relief to the Roman Catholics, his opinions too were so well known, and his recent conduct, in encouraging the House not to repeal the measure at the importunity of the rioters, had been so decided, that the timorous and the time-serving tradesmen of Bristol, keen as they were proverbially reputed to be in all matters of profit and loss, could not comprehend how a man who was not, as his enemies said, a Jesuit and a pupil of St. Omer, should feel so much enthusiasm, and act with so much resolution, in a cause entirely alien to his own religious belief.

Among his friends, therefore, the election had long been a subject of anxious conversation. The more intelligent merchants of Bristol, the Nobles, the Champions, and the Farris, forgetting whatever offence he may have given some of them on the Irish business, still numbered themselves as his decided supporters, and were anxious to take any measures, of which he might approve, to secure his return. Mr. Joseph Harford also remained his steadfast friend, though his name had been mentioned as that of an eligible candidate in Burke's place. Yet the party had, in the course of the last few years, sensibly lost ground. Cruger, who stood on an interest independent of the pure Whigs, thought his own seat secure, and was not prepared to unite heartily with his illustrious colleague. Other two gentlemen, one of them a defeated candidate of the last election, had, in the spring, announced their intention of contesting Bristol on the Tory interest, and, from the result of their canvass, they both felt confident of success.

Burke, on the other hand, was not sensible of his

danger. Conscious of the great services he had recently rendered to the country, and of the high position he occupied in the consideration of the people, he could scarcely suppose that Bristol would be indifferent to what had filled all England with admiration. Many paltry artifices were employed to prejudice his cause. It was even reported that he had no intention of again offering himself to the electors. When his friends wrote to him on the subject of the impending contest, the language he used was not that of a very eager candidate. He told Mr. Harford that he would willingly resign any pretensions in his favour; that he was not rich at the last election, and had not since become more affluent; and that his horror at the expenses of another contest was not lessened by the reflection that they would fall on the purses of his supporters. On, at last, communicating his resolution to try his fortunes again at Bristol, he looked on the result, whatever it might be, as an interesting experiment in political philosophy. "It remains to be seen," he wrote to a Mr. Job Watts, "whether there be enough of independence among us to support a representative who throws himself on his own good behaviour, and the good dispositions of his constituents, without playing any little game, either to bribe or to delude them. I shall put this to the proof within a few days, when I hope to have the pleasure of taking you by the hand. I shall certainly make the experiment. It must have a good effect, one way or the other; for it is always of use to know the true temper of the time and country one lives in."*

There was a memorable meeting held, on Tuesday, the sixth of September, in the Guildhall of Bristol. The

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 368.

Mayor was in the chair ; a numerous body of the most respectable electors filled the hall ; and Burke stood forward to explain those parts of his Parliamentary conduct which were supposed to have offended his constituents. It is generally considered at the hustings incumbent on a candidate to be witty. The best electioneering speech is supposed to be that which most occasions the laughter of the multitude, and draws their attention away from the serious questions really at issue. Burke's addresses to his constituents were of a far different kind. However witty he might frequently be in the House of Commons, his speeches to the electors of Bristol were invariably serious, earnest, and respectful. Without any exception, the vindictory speech he delivered on this occasion is the greatest ever delivered on an English hustings. It ranks in the highest class of political oratory. Dismaying to apologize or to excuse, boldly admitting that, on the Irish commercial propositions, Lord Beauchamp's Debtors Bill, and the Roman Catholic Relief Bill, he had acted resolutely on his own judgment, and, whatever might be the opinions of his constituents, neither could nor would act otherwise, because he regarded these measures as based on principles upon which he had endeavoured to establish his own reputation for statesmanship, and looked upon them as the distinguishing colours of his political life ; he challenged their approbation for the very conduct which they had disapproved ; and, after explaining, with all his matchless powers of eloquence, the reasons for doing as he had done, every sentence of which has received the adhesion of posterity, giving the electors very clearly to understand that it was not himself only, but they and the intelligence of every popular constituency that were

then on trial, he left it with them to decide whether or not he should again contest Bristol.

His friends were fully convinced. Resolutions were unanimously passed, expressing the highest admiration of him, both as a senator and as a man, stigmatizing the low arts which had been practised to misrepresent the great services he had conferred upon his country, and earnestly requesting so excellent a representative to allow himself again to be put in nomination. Fortified by the approbation of so large and influential a meeting, he went, accompanied by the Mayor and a numerous body of the most respectable gentlemen of the town, to the Council House, and from the Council House to the Exchange, where, in the customary forms, he offered himself once more as a candidate for the city. He then began his canvass. Had his election depended on the Whig gentlemen, he would have been triumphantly returned. But the ignorant freeholders of that age, intent on their ale and their guineas, and horrified by the reports of Jesuitism and Catholicism, were less than lukewarm. After two days of canvassing, he saw that his election was hopeless, and determined at once to withdraw his pretensions.

In the Guildhall of Bristol there was, on Saturday, the ninth of September, another scene, mortifying to all friends of popular freedom. The great political philosopher of all time, the most resplendent of orators, the most far-seeing of statesmen, the champion of civil liberty, of religious toleration, and of administrative reform, stood forth, amid the tumult of the poll, to announce his intention of retiring from the contest, since, after deliberate examination, he had become convinced that it was not on him the choice of the electors would ultimately fall.

Not one word of reproach, not one expression of depreciation fell from his lips. Even in the hour of disappointment and defeat, he more than preserved his philosophical serenity, and could still draw lessons of universal wisdom. “I have read,” said he, “the book of life for a long time, and I have read other books a little. Nothing has happened to me, but what has happened to men much better than me, and in times and nations full as good as the age and country that we live in.” The most vehement of the Tory candidates had, on the preceding day, fallen down dead. This melancholy incident was seized on by the orator in the farewell address. Again his voice was heard above the wild uproar of faction and of intoxication, telling the electors that the fate of the worthy gentleman who had been snatched away in the middle of the contest, “while his desires were as warm and his hopes as eager as ours, has feelingly told us what shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue!” In contrast with this language, the expressions of a resident in Bristol, who, in a letter to Mr. Urban, thought fit, at the time, to instruct the readers of the *Metropolis* in the causes of Burke’s rejection, is curious. “To follow Mr. Burke’s conduct through the House,” wrote this anonymous correspondent, “we shall find him steadily pursuing that pernicious maxim, of not obeying the voice of his constituents.”*

Burke might have been excused had he, after having met with such ingratitude, shaken at once the dust of Bristol from off his feet, and left the city immediately and for ever. He remained however some ten days longer. Cruger’s supporters were enraged at him, because, though their sinister practices had been the prin-

* *Gentleman’s Magazine*, vol. l. p. 619.

cipal cause of his defeat, he did not induce all his friends to vote for his former colleague, who soon found himself at the bottom of the poll, with no chance of bettering his position. They bitterly resented Burke's appearance in the streets, surrounded by his Whig supporters ; and they appeared to think that, after he had declined the election, he ought not to have cultivated his private friendships, nor maintained any further connection with the city. He however continued to the last all the pleasant acquaintanceships he had formed. His brother Richard, by afterwards being made Recorder of the town, assisted in perpetuating the remembrance of the tie that had been, on the part of the citizens, so rudely dissolved. Long after Burke had any personal interest to promote, he was as assiduous as ever in doing good to persons who had become known to him during his electioneering visits to Bristol. His kindness to a poor clergyman, whom he recommended to the favour of the Prince of Wales, has been frequently mentioned. Other instances, of a similar nature, might be given. His temper was as gentle after his defeat as before the contest. He could spend an evening at his friend Noble's, patiently submitting to be taught the children's game at cards called Beggar-my-Neighbour, by the mistress of the house, and playfully exulting on beating his instructress.*

His political allies had less patience on learning the result. Fox was busily contesting Westminster when he heard of Burke's defeat at Bristol. He wrote, informing him of his indignation against the rascally city, and declaring that it required, in his opinion, all Burke's candour, and that other feature of his character, which could only be indicated by terming it “ the reverse of selfish-

* Prior, p. 199.

ness," to look upon the rejection with common patience. After some remarks on the different fortunes of their friends, Fox stated the danger he had himself incurred by the prejudices against Popery, and showed himself fearful lest, in a pledge he had given in an electioneering advertisement, to the effect that he never had supported, and never would support, any measure tending to the establishment of the Catholic religion, Burke might consider that he had, to gain the Westminster Election, not stood manfully by the great cause of toleration. While the cheers of the electors were ringing in his ears, Fox earnestly endeavoured to exculpate himself in writing to Burke; and this letter itself conclusively shows how much those liberal sentiments which Fox so powerfully advocated, were still continually impressed upon him by his old friend, and how anxious he was to do nothing that might injure him in the good opinion of this great preceptor, who had, on the hustings, openly avowed the most comprehensive principles of toleration, and, rather than compromise them, had thrown the suffrages of the electors of Bristol to the winds.*

Burke's first act, after leaving Bristol, was to join Fox on the hustings at Westminster. He assisted him until the conclusion of the poll, and remained to share his triumph. But the hurry, riot, debauch, and extravagance, were far from being so agreeable to him as Fox confessed they were to himself. Burke experienced a feeling of relief when, late in September, he could quietly return to Beaconsfield, and, while walking among the trees he so much loved, might, as the autumn leaves were falling around him, meditate on his recent disappointment, and decide on what should be his future conduct.

He was not so eager to obtain another seat in Par-

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 376.

liament as would naturally be supposed. His defeat, however it might be regarded, was certainly a mortification ; and, long before other people dreamed of their possibility, he saw in prospect other vexations, which he was not anxious to encounter. The Duke of Richmond's motion in favour of Universal Suffrage, Sir George Savile's acquiescence in the scheme for returning to Triennial Parliaments, and the many other crude plans of Reform that had been recently adopted by his friends in Opposition, rendered him somewhat reluctant to again return to a position in which he might be compelled to oppose persons whom he was accustomed to love and honour. With Lord Rockingham, indeed, he generally agreed on all the main lines of public policy ; but it was evident to himself, from this time forward, that, were anything to happen to his noble leader, his position among the young and eager spirits who were, at the approach of victory, ranking themselves in what had hitherto been considered the Rockingham party, would become most arduous and exceptionable.*

The great Administrative Reformer of the year could not, however, be spared. As soon as his reverse was known, his friends set about considering how he could most speedily be again made a Member of Parliament. Lord Rockingham's pocket borough of Malton was once more fixed upon as Burke's place of refuge from popular instability. Conscious of his own great services, his eminent virtues, and his unrivalled abilities as a statesman, his doubts of the soundness of the extreme democratic theories then in agitation were not likely to be lessened on finding himself compelled to have recourse to the close constituency of a small Yorkshire borough under the

* See his Letter to Mr. Harford, Sept. 27, 1780.

influence of the enlightened Marquis, after having been rudely rejected by the powerful and independent constituency of Bristol, because he had refused to court the electors by servile adulation, because he had endeavoured to establish a free trade between England and Ireland, because he had striven to do justice to the debtor, and because, at the hazard of his life, he had laboured to emancipate the Catholic.

All these, though his great and prominent efforts, did not then complete the philanthropic cycle of his endeavours. At the time of his defeat for Bristol, there was lying in a desk a code of admirable regulations to mitigate the horrors of the African Slave Trade, and to prepare these outcasts from the pale of freedom for a slow and therefore salutary emancipation. Among all his other ill-requited labours, this also was the unappreciated work of this very year. There had been just chosen into the new Parliament, for the Borough of Hull, a young man whose father and grandfather had been Baltic merchants, but who, himself, relinquishing the lucrative pursuits of commerce and the still more fascinating attractions of political life, was to devote his noble energies to the spiritual elevation of his fellow-creatures and the abolition of the trade in slaves. It is due, however, to Burke to say, that he had striven to improve the condition of the African, and to free England from the guilt of that abominable traffic, before the walls of the House of Commons had resounded with the melodious and earnest accents of William Wilberforce. The defeated candidate for Bristol had, indeed, many internal consolations in these hours of enforced leisure.

CHAPTER XXIX.

1780-1781.

PREPARING FOR THE FINAL ASSAULT.

THE arrangement by which Burke was again to enter the House of Commons, through what he called the back door of the Constitution, could not of course be immediately carried into effect. At the general election, two Members, William Weddel and Savile Finch, had been returned for Malton; and it was only after the meeting of Parliament that one of these seats could be vacated, and Burke be substituted for the retiring Member. In November, Savile Finch was made Steward of the three Chiltern Hundreds of the county of Buckingham, and a new writ was, by Ministerial courtesy, ordered directly for Malton. It was not however until after the Christmas holidays that Burke was again ready, as one of the Members for this small borough, to take his seat in the House of Commons.*

In the meantime, on the last day of October, the work of the new Parliament had begun, without his tall form and intellectual features being seen in their accustomed place, in the front row on the Opposition benches. The first business was, of course, the choice of a Speaker. On this occasion, the formality was more than usually interesting. Sir Fletcher Norton having

* *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xxi. p. 788.

given unpardonable offence to the King by his memorable speech in the year 1777, his re-election was objected to by the courtiers, on the plea of ill health. Wolfran Cornwall, Jenkinson's brother-in-law and Chatham's valuable and accredited instrument of real business, was proposed as the new Speaker by the Government. Dunning nominated and the Opposition supported Norton, who stood forth from their ranks and, in apparently robust health and in very vociferous tones, seemed a living contradiction to the reasons that had been given for excluding him from the Chair. Rigby alone, boldly disdaining all such excuses, declared, as the open leader of the King's Friends, that the late Speaker having flown in the face of the Sovereign, they were justified, on party grounds, in endeavouring to obtain a more courtly organ of the House of Commons. They succeeded in their effort. Cornwall was chosen by a majority of fifty-nine.

Royal smiles, more than ordinarily sincere, greeted the new Speaker, as, escorted by a troop of loyal Members, he was introduced to the King. Several days were spent in taking the oaths. It was not until Tuesday, the sixth of November, that the Speech from the Throne was considered, and the debates on the Address began. They were much the same as usual. In the House of Commons, as usual, an amendment was proposed; and, as usual, the Administration had about the old majority of between eighty and ninety. The result of the elections, as expressed in these first divisions in the House of Commons, appeared anything but favourable to the Opposition. But the discussions had a more earnest and energetic aspect than they had ever previously worn. It was evident, both from the language and manifest resolution of the leaders, that a season of Parliamentary

conflict such as that generation had never known, and that had no parallel since those nights of tremendous struggle which terminated in the fall of the long Administration of Sir Robert Walpole, was at hand.

Thanks were voted to the late Speaker. Thanks were voted to Sir H. Clinton and Lord Cornwallis, for the reduction of Charleston, and also for a victory over General Gage at Camden, the news of which had only lately been received. Supplies were voted for the Navy. Supplies were voted for the Army. But the temper which prevailed among the followers of Shelburne and Rockingham, as well as the indignant invectives which came from the lips of military and naval officers of great eminence, against the American Secretary and the First Lord of the Admiralty, were strong indications that the reign of incapacity and folly would not much longer be endured.

The Channel fleet, in a time of great danger, had again been left without an efficient commander. Hardy had died in command. Every officer of high reputation again refused to serve under the orders of Lord Sandwich. Another retired veteran, Admiral Geary, was induced to come forth from his retreat, and to take a duty of no ordinary responsibility at no ordinary crisis. One of the most severe losses which commerce ever experienced in the whole course of the war, was inflicted on England, while the British fleet was at sea, by the capture of the most valuable West Indian convoy that had ever sailed from her shores, and at a time when the effects of such a loss were the most difficult to repair. The unusual spectacle was seen, of sixty English ships being prizes under the Spanish flag. Conscious of the inferiority of the fleet under his command, Geary resigned in disgust ; and again there was a great difficulty in finding

a British admiral to command a British squadron in the British Channel. Admiral Barrington refused the first place, which Admiral Darby was, after some misgivings, at last adventurous enough to accept; but nothing decisive was undertaken against the combined enemy, the general opinion in the Navy being, that the First Lord of the Admiralty was their most formidable foe. Yet, as though expressly to revive and maintain in their utmost intensity those dissensions of which the conduct of Palliser and the countenance he received from the Government had originated, Lord Sandwich chose to defy Keppel and the distinguished naval officers who had acquitted him and declared the charges of his accuser false and malicious, by appointing Sir Hugh to the Governorship of Greenwich Hospital. Nor did Lord Sandwich's championship of the most detested officer in the whole British Navy terminate with this injudicious patronage. On finding, as he must have expected, the policy of the appointment arraigned by the adversaries of the Ministry, he brought his favourite Sir Hugh again into Parliament, as Member for his own Borough of Huntingdon.

This was throwing the gauntlet in the face of the Opposition with the most insulting audacity. As such it was considered, and as such it was resented by men who were not readily daunted. The state of the Navy was not so admirable, nor had its victories been so numerous, nor its efficiency been so manifest, that the most profligate and reckless statesman that ever occupied the first seat at the Board, could, at such a season, outrage with impunity the public opinion of England.

Fox took the earliest opportunity of announcing that he would, immediately after Christmas, move a vote of censure against Lord Sandwich, for appointing Sir Hugh

Palliser to the Governorship of Greenwich Hospital, and also follow it up by an Address to the Throne, requesting the removal of the First Lord of the Admiralty from his Majesty's councils. By that time Burke, who felt much the oblique reflection on Keppel, would be in his place again, and be prepared to maintain with the utmost ardour the position his companion in arms had boldly taken.

Menaced by the utmost hostility of a powerful Opposition, and so ready to encourage the most fatal factions in the Navy, it could scarcely be expected that at such a moment even such a Ministry would betray any precipitate eagerness to add to the number of our maritime enemies.

This was however the case. In September, a British frigate had taken, on the coast of Newfoundland, an American packet, bound for Holland, and having on board Mr. Henry Laurens, the late President of Congress. His papers had been thrown overboard, but they were dexterously saved from the waves. Among them was discovered the draft of a commercial treaty with the States of Amsterdam. Mr. Laurens was brought to England, and committed, on a charge of high treason, to the Tower. It was against Holland that the British Government thought fit to appear most indignant. Sir Joseph Yorke, our Ambassador, was ordered to insist on the authorities at the Hague disavowing the conduct of Amsterdam, and punishing her Pensionary and all who were implicated in the correspondence. The States-General requested time for due consultation. The English Government would hear of no delay. A second memorial, more stringent than the first, was delivered. As the answer to it was not considered satisfactory, the

English representative was recalled ; and, on the twentieth of December, while Parliament had been adjourned for the Christmas recess, war was declared against Holland. Queen Elizabeth, Oliver Cromwell, or the great War Minister at the accession of George III., could not, when the genius of England towered pre-eminently over all Europe, have held higher language than Lord North and his colleagues did in these negotiations ; or show less aversion for a conflict than they, with their hands, as might be thought, already full enough, to embark in a contest with this old Protestant and Republican ally.

The first effort Burke made, after again entering the House of Commons, on the twenty-fifth of January, 1781, was to condemn the haste with which, without consulting Parliament, this new war had been begun. On that day a Royal Message was brought down to the two Houses, with a copy of the manifesto that had been issued, and other documents relating to the declaration of hostilities.

Burke immediately rose, and deplored the circumstances which had occasioned the rupture. It was impossible, he said, without information, to pronounce on the justice of the war ; but, though it were the most just that was ever waged, in prudence and policy it must still be considered as most questionable. Lord North, in reply, could only hold out hopes which had already been a hundred times disappointed, and tried to keep up the courage of the House by declarations which his friends regarded as magnanimous, but his opponents, with more reason, as foolhardy. Fox, Mr. Thomas Townshend, and Lord John Cavendish, assailed the Minister with the keenest invective. The Address in answer to the Royal Message was, however, carried by a majority of seventy-nine. In the Lords, the Adminis-

tration appeared even still more successful on the division ; but the debate was protracted until two o'clock in the morning, and Burke drew up an eloquent and statesmanlike protest for the Rockingham Peers.*

Their numerical defeat only increased the ardour of the Opposition. Fox hastened to bring on his vote of censure against the appointment of Sir Hugh Palliser ; and such a day as that first of February, the House of Commons, in the keenest conflicts of heated parties, has seldom known. On one side sat Palliser, near Lord North, and trusting to Ministerial support ; on the other, with Burke and Fox at his side, and surrounded by the whole strength of their forces, Keppel confronted his defeated calumniator. After having been, at the last election, thrown out for Windsor, it was said, by the personal influence of the King, Keppel had been enthusiastically chosen for the county of Surrey ; these indications of the spirit of both the Court and the people were dexterously used by Fox, who, in this opening speech, neither spared the King nor his Ministers ; and argued, with great force, that the promotion of a man declared by court-martial guilty of bringing wanton and malicious charges against his superior officer, was likely to be most injurious to the Naval Service. The First Minister, in reply, was, on this occasion, grave and earnest ; feeling the reality of the contest, Lord North scarcely ventured to indulge for one moment in those habitual pleasantries with which he had so long endeavoured to turn the laugh against his indignant adversaries. Lord Howe, the Black Dick of the sailors, with his usual solemn and melancholy expression on his features, which were seldom lighted up with a smile except on a morn-

* Parl. Hist., vol. xxi. pp. 1078, 1104. Ann. Reg., 1781, p. 288 and 290.

ing when there appeared a chance of fighting an enemy, sternly reprendered Palliser's conduct, and threw the shield of his great personal authority over his friend Keppel. Governor Johnstone declaimed and gesticulated in his bold, fierce, and energetic manner against the style in which the British fleet was handled on the twenty-seventh of July, and professed to deplore, with his eyes upturned and his hands before his face, the illuminations on three successive nights, which, with much disingenuousness, he represented as for the glory acquired on the day of battle, instead of being, what these signs of national rejoicing really were, the unequivocal expression of the delight of the people at the acquittal of a favourite Admiral, unjustly accused, put upon his trial, and borne down by Court and Admiralty. Keppel, with dignity, retorted on Palliser. Palliser, with anything but dignity, declared that those only had reason to fear who calumniated the character of others; admitted that he had been compelled to abscond, to conceal himself, and to resign his employments; and compared the course he had taken to that which, in similar circumstances, had been pursued by the great Dutch admiral, Tromp. But as though Palliser had not quite sufficient to do in defending himself, he went out of his way to attack Burke for having expressed a wish that, after the Vice-admiral had been compelled to resign his valuable appointments, he might not to be allowed in retirement to suffer from absolute want. Rather than receive such a pension, Palliser said that he would sit at his own gate and beg from every passing traveller, except Burke himself, from whom under no extremity of distress would he ever receive alms.

Burke rose and apologized for troubling the House.

He assured the Vice-Admiral, that he neither wished to bribe him nor to reward him ; but that, in the situation to which Palliser had reduced himself by his malicious accusations, however much he might reject his assistance, he could not prevent him from feeling pity. Burke then elaborately examined point after point of Palliser's speech, and grappled with every naval detail as though he had been personally present in the action and had witnessed everything that was done. The most prejudiced supporters of the Government, who had entered Parliament for the first time at the last election, and then for the first time saw all Burke's oratorical powers displayed, candidly confessed that he far surpassed all their expectations, and they listened with admiration and astonishment. Every weapon out of his rich armoury of brilliant rhetoric was wielded in succession, and each with dazzling skill. Powerful argument, keen ridicule, beautiful metaphor, consummate irony, glowing declamation, were all exerted with irresistible effect ; and, as he sat down, he left the impression on all who heard him that, though there might be great debaters in the House, Burke was, without a rival, the most marvellous of orators. One of his happiest metaphorical allusions to the technicalities of the naval profession was made in this naval debate. After Lord North had finished his speech, he had found great difficulty in settling his amendment to Fox's motion, and some minutes had elapsed, during which the Prime Minister was obliged to call in the aid of the Solicitor-General. Having answered every argument, Burke, in the full swing of his oratorical triumph, remarked, amid laughter and cheers from all sides of the House, "The noble Lord has been employed in splicing the motion and in fishing its mast ; but he

need not have fired a gun to leeward as a signal of distress, it being obvious that his mizen-topmasts are all shot away."

The Ministers succeeded in defeating Fox's vote of censure by a majority of sixty-five. But though Palliser held his appointment until his death, and though there were afterwards other Tory and Courtly Administrations, strong enough to defy any opposition, the brand remained upon him, and Keppel was avenged. No Government dared again to give the obnoxious Palliser a naval command.*

The Ministers had scarcely staved off this difficulty when they were menaced by another, and perhaps still more formidable, assault. Burke gave notice of his intention to introduce again his celebrated plan for Economical Reform, which had, during the last session, been nearly carried against the Government, and which the Rockingham party regarded as one of the fundamental measures of any Administration which they might form. To the young Members, who had heard of the enthusiasm this scheme had called forth in the last Parliament, the proposal was also a subject of especial interest. On the fifteenth of February, when he moved for leave again to introduce the Establishment Bill, the House was crowded; but the immense pile of popular petitions which, during the last year, filled the House and prevented him almost from seeing the Ministers across the table, was no longer there; and Lord North evidently felt that, the storm having in some degree abated, he could venture then to meet boldly that to which at first he had been compelled to bend. He intimated that, though he would not oppose the introduction of

* Wraxall's Hist. Mem., vol. ii. pp. 319-33. Parl. Hist., vol. xxi. p. 1151.

the Bill, he should be compelled to resist it at a further stage.

Four days afterwards it was read a first time. Burke proposed that the second reading should be fixed for Thursday, the twenty-second. The veteran Lord Nugent rose, and objected to such an early day. The Bill, he said, would be only printed by the Wednesday morning, and as that was the fast-day, there would be no time for studying the measure. Burke, with infinite humour, replied. As for Wednesday being a fast-day, so much the better ; on a day of fasting and humiliation Members could not be better employed than in considering a Bill of economical reform. It would serve them in the place of dinner. The preamble would do for the grace before meat ; the Board of Works would be one dish, and the Board of Trade another. But had the true reason for the delay been given ? No ! It was not because Wednesday was a day of fasting ; but because Thursday was for the benefit of the French dancer, Vestris, that the Bill was to be deferred. Burke proceeded in a strain of ludicrous irony to contrast the interests of the State with the interests of Vestris ; and concluded by earnestly condemning the levity of the rich, who, in a time of war and misfortune, could neglect the greatest national objects for theatrical entertainments.*

The rebuke was well deserved. Lord George Gordon had just been tried for constructive treason, and, through the eloquence of Erskine, acquitted. This event was no sooner known, than the interest the trial excited subsided, and in the minds of fashionable people the dancer Vestris and his son superseded the fanatic Lord George. During the saddest periods of the

* Parl. Hist., vol. xxi. p. 1242.

American War, the dangers of the Royal troops in New York and South Carolina were forgotten in the attractions of the opera and the ballet. Nothing was talked of but the benefit of Vestris. On the Thursday that Burke wished to have for the second reading of his first Bill of Economical Reform, honourable Members, with their families, crowded the theatre, and the favourite French dancer realized, on this single night, for his exclusive profit, some fourteen hundred pounds.*

The motion for the second reading was postponed until the following Monday. That was a great and memorable day. Burke requested the Clerk to read the celebrated resolution of the sixth of last April, declaring that the influence of the Crown had increased, was increasing, and ought to be diminished. When this had been done, he sat down, stating that he would not then trespass on the attention of the House. But the Bill had eloquent supporters, who felt it the greatest honour to distinguish themselves, for the first time, in a cause which the author of the measure had rendered so illustrious. There was the young Lord Maitland, then Burke's pupil, afterwards the Earl of Lauderdale, and one of the noble Peers who grudged to the great propounder of the scheme that pension which was never more deservedly bestowed as the reward of the most disinterested and the most untiring services. There was Richard Brinsley Sheridan, who had, at the last election, come into Parliament for Stafford, and had spoken once in November on the petition against his return, and who, though his success as a public speaker had not at the outset been very decided, yet, feeling confident that he had within him ge-

* Walpole's Letters to Sir Horace Mann (Second Series), vol. iii. Correspondence between Walpole and Mason, vol. ii. p. 153.

nuine oratorical powers, now made another effort, which, among gentlemen jealous of a mere theatrical fame, and looking rather superciliously on the Manager of Drury Lane, succeeded, even against such disadvantages, in supporting the reputation of the author of *The Duenna*, *The Critic*, and *The School for Scandal*. There was William Pitt, the younger son of Lord Chatham, who, after having unsuccessfully contested the election for the University of Cambridge, had since been elected for Appleby, a borough under the influence of Sir James Lowther, and who, on this night, surprised and delighted the House by a speech in favour of the Bill, delivered by a youth of twenty-two years of age, with all the gravity, self-command, dignity, and copiousness of a practised orator and a matured statesman. Forgetting for the time all the antipathy with which he still secretly regarded Chatham's memory, Burke exclaimed exultingly to the friends beside him, "This is not merely a chip of the old block; but the old block itself."* He concluded the debate himself with a speech which, for all that could be called sterling genius, no person of the generation among whom he had yet been contending, or of the generation then advancing prominently for the first time on the scene of public affairs, had the most remote possibility of rivalling. Argument the most powerful, diction the most beautiful, and the most wonderful of intellectual accomplishments, fully warmed by the debate and called into action, so that every objection against the Bill was triumphantly answered, could not however secure to Burke the victory. At midnight the House divided, and the Bill was lost for the session by a majority of forty-three.†

* Wraxall's Hist. Mem. vol. ii. p. 342. † Parl. Hist., vol. xxi. p. 1292.

This was but a small majority. Putting out of view their success in the last session, the Opposition might consider the result equivalent to a victory. Lord North was driven to the most desperate expedients to maintain his position. In gratifying his supporters, he actually set at defiance all the principles of economy which Burke had so finely expounded, and engaged in transactions which formed nothing less than a system of bribery on the most extensive and the most ruinous scale.

No act of his ministry excited keener censure than his negotiation of a loan of twelve millions in the March of this year. So little were the interests of the public regarded, that, as soon as the terms were settled, the new stock went up to eleven per cent. above par, and at least a million of money was at once placed by the Government in the pockets of the subscribers to the loan.* This was, however, not the worst feature of the transaction. It turned out that the subscribers who really had their names down for the largest amounts, or who, in the names of others, virtually gained all the advantages in this profligate bargain, were really the Minister's followers in Parliament, and had been especially chosen by him as objects of preference.

Lord North deliberately erred with his eyes open. On the very day when he opened the budget, and before the result of the transaction was known, Fox, in a financial speech of great ability, clearly demonstrated how disadvantageous the bargain would be to the tax-payers of England, who were already enough heavily burdened, and who had right to the protection of a Minister uniting in his person the two offices of First Commissioner of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer. On the

* Annual Register, 1781, p. 183.

next day, when the resolutions of the Committee were reported, the Opposition again renewed their objections.

Burke entered into the debate. He truly declared that, knowing how much the credit of Government depended on the Votes of Supply, he had always been careful not to interfere with resolutions in Committees of Ways and Means. Showing, however, that this case was altogether exceptional, he enforced Fox's arguments of the previous day, and elaborately contrasted Lord North's profusion with M. Necker's economy. Then retorting on the Minister, who had said that Members were too poor to have taken any considerable share in the loan, Burke said, that he wished that they would come in rich and go out poor; but unfortunately the reverse was true. They came in thin and lean; but, like the weasel, mentioned by *Æsop*, they grew so large and sleek that they were unable again to get out. He made the allusion most ludicrous by stroking his own stomach, and comparing it with the corpulence of Lord North, who had fattened amid the calamities of his Administration; until at this time, as Burke observed, like Shakespeare's Justice in "fair round belly, with good capon lined," his enormous and increasing proportions were the constant topics of mirth even among his own supporters. No ordinary muscles could resist the effect of Burke's quotation and the significant action with which it was accompanied. The House was in a roar; and even Lord North's sides were seen shaking with suppressed laughter.*

The Minister managed to defeat the different motions

* Collected Speeches, vol. ii. p. 223. Parl. Hist., vol. xxi. p. 1343. Wraxall's Hist. Mem., vol. ii. p. 363. Letter of Wilberforce of June 9, 1781.

made by the Opposition in respect to this loan. But the debates damaged him irreparably in the opinion of the Country. He was compelled to hear his conduct commented upon in language such as no other statesman has ever heard; and he had to suffer such mortifications as no other Prime Minister of England has ever endured. George Byng, the Member for Middlesex, honourably distinguished himself among the Opposition in sifting the scandalous proceedings of this financial transaction to the bottom. He read out in the House, and appealed for confirmation to the eminent banker Mr. Henry Drummond, the names of the different clerks in his establishment who appeared as holders of scrip to the extent of some four hundred and forty thousand pounds, obviously to screen their principals, who, as Members of Parliament, could not with propriety appear ostensibly in the business; and at each name, Mr. Drummond, sitting behind Lord North, was obliged, amid the indignation of the independent portion of the House, to give an assenting nod. Even in the most corrupt times, such an exposure was without precedent. The Minister's easy manner quite forsook him, and he seemed to feel acutely the humiliation of the hour, as he shrunk with confusion on his seat.*

Such conduct would, in these days, destroy the authority of the proudest Legislature in the world. It fully excused Fox and Burke in the vehemence of their invectives in those great debates. There are times and occasions when not to be violent is to be lukewarm. But Burke, at this period, amid all his earnest reprobation, was accustomed, as in the debates on the loan, to indulge in so many sallies of wit and humour, that his oratory

* Wraxall's Hist. Mem., vol. ii. p. 370.

had in general a more agreeable tone than it some years afterwards assumed, when, with advancing age, the prize, for which he had so nobly contended, slowly receded from view, and, amid vexation and sorrow, his political prospects became strangely cheerless and desolate.

Had Dr. Johnson been in the House in one of the discussions on the Army Estimates, even he would have been compelled to acknowledge that wit was one of the qualities Burke possessed in a very eminent degree. Jenkinson, as Secretary at War, brought forward an account, from which it appeared that, under the head of extraordinary services, the large sum of two million seven hundred thousand pounds had recently been transmitted to America. The money having been principally sent through the agency of Alderman Harley, he was called upon for a detailed statement of the manner in which it had been applied. He contented himself with reading rapidly from a paper that he held in his hands a few specific items, and then, after having only been on his legs for about five minutes, abruptly sat down. Burke sprang up. "This account," he observed, "is the most laconic that was ever given of so great a sum expended in the public service. Considering the magnitude of the sums the right honourable gentleman has swallowed, he merits admiration for the promptitude with which he has either digested or disgorged them. His charge and his discharge are equally expeditious. He is a species of canal through which the profusion of the Government passes. I imagine, however, that it does not flow off altogether without contributing something to his nourishment. No doubt such remittances have in them a fattening quality; or,

to use a vulgar phrase, ‘they stick to the ribs.’ Oh, how I long for an inspection of this Harleian Miscellany!” Alderman Harley was, in his personal development, very corpulent. Burke’s metaphors had a more ludicrous effect because, while everybody else was roaring with laughter, the full face of the courtly alderman retained its habitually grave expression, and he continued to stare solemnly at his brilliant assailant without troubling himself to make any reply.*

The silence of this dull citizen was at least judicious. Even Lord North himself, one of the most witty of men, was no match for Burke. In a debate on the first report of the Commission of Accounts, which Lord North had appointed to defeat indirectly a motion of Colonel Barré, and to which Burke, as delegating at the nomination of the Minister to other persons than Members of Parliament a superintendence of the public expenditure, had the most decided objections, he went into the most elaborate constitutional arguments against this expedient, and assailed the Prime Minister with the most poignant ridicule. Lord North, in defending the Commission, after having attempted to reply separately to all Burke’s objections, concluded with saying, “I believe I have now answered everything in the speech of the honourable gentleman but his wit, which I readily acknowledge to be unanswerable. In that respect he is greatly my superior.”†

But what Lord North would not so readily have admitted was Burke’s great superiority in real statesmanship, which, in enforcing with consummate ability, this wit was merely an auxiliary, and in no respect a principal arm. Neither would the careless Prime Minister have

* Wraxall’s Hist. Mem., vol. ii. p. 273. † Parl. Hist., vol. xxii. p. 217.

perhaps admitted, that in all positive virtues his brilliant adversary was as much his superior as in the most intellectual accomplishments.

Delegates from the different counties were again assembled in London. They held a kind of National Convention, and appeared a rival Parliament. Many Members of the House of Commons had also been chosen delegates, and did not think that in accepting this office they were acting contrary to their dignity as members of the more august assembly at Westminster. Courtiers, however, bitterly arraigned their opponents for allowing themselves to be put forward in the character of delegates. Fox proudly defended his conduct in this capacity. It was remarked however as somewhat strange, that neither was Burke himself a delegate, nor when his friends were attacked for their conduct as the nominees of the county associations, although the debates were of a very warm and personal nature, did he address the House. He also gave at this time another friendly rebuke to Alderman Sawbridge, for avowing his obedience to the instructions of his constituents. It is therefore not surprising to observe the men who were then, as liberal politicians, beginning their public career, finding the ardent, if somewhat indefinite opinions of Fox more acceptable in their eyes than the severe lessons of the eloquent Gamaliel, at whose feet this young and vigorous leader had first been inspired with a genuine passion for public freedom.*

There were other indications of a divergence in the paths of the two statesmen, then apparently slight, but still most significant. Fox and his juvenile allies generally came down to the House in the blue coat and

* *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xxi. p. 1373.

buff waistcoat, which, as resembling the Continental uniform, was supposed externally to represent their sympathies for the American cause. Burke's dress underwent no change. His coat, as of old, sufficiently rusty, was of the ordinary black or brown. Sitting silent and absorbed, lost in thought and saddened by care, with the lines on his face every year becoming more deeply marked, and his features sterner in their expression, his eyes beaming with intense brightness through the spectacles which he now constantly wore, and his countenance free, open, and animated, but also strong, massive, and determined in its cast; all the young Members looked upon him with respect, some even with absolute reverence, but few ventured to approach him, or thought it easy to acquire his friendship. Fox, on the other hand, was ready to receive all comers. His disposition was eminently attractive; his smile singularly pure. He was still almost as profligate as ever; but even vice, as it came in contact with his manly, dashing, and confiding nature, appeared to lose many of its degrading qualities, and leave him comparatively unsullied. His life was spent between Brooks's Club and the House of Commons. Wherever he went, his young admirers crowded around him; and nothing could appear gayer, more jovial, or more unrestrained, than the fellowship between the rising leader of the Whigs and his eager followers, as, drunk with youth, health, and confidence, they marshalled themselves under his banner.

The truth however must be told. With all the openness of Fox's character, there had been more deliberate calculation in his ambition than some of his friends would readily have allowed. Though he had for seven years been out of office and opposed to the American

war, yet he had, until very lately, stood aloof, in a kind of independent position, allowing himself full liberty to accept any advantages that might offer. Though agreeing with Burke and the Marquis in their general political principles, he had even, so recently as in the year 1779, been prepared to accept office without them ; and had given them very unequivocally to understand that he did not consider himself one of their political connection. The way to victory appeared at last certain. As Lord Rockingham would evidently be Lord North's successor, and as, according to all the wisest political speculators, the Ministry was doomed, Fox enrolled himself avowedly in the ranks of the pure Whigs ; and, with every encouragement from Burke, who, with the most self-sacrificing disinterestedness, had mainly been the agent in bringing this union about, openly assumed the leadership of the Rockingham party in the House of Commons.*

Yet the friendship of Fox and Burke, though on both sides affectionate and sincere, was from the first far from complete. Though Fox was, as Burke afterwards said, a man made to be loved, even he could not at this time have added, that Charles was a man to be respected. Neither of them were conscious that their alliance was after all purely political. It is strange, even in their years of the closest intimacy, how few

* Writing to Lord Rockingham in 1779, on the propriety of accepting office, Fox expressed himself in very significant terms. " Do you not," he said, " in some instances rest your refusal upon grounds to which we are so far from pledged, that we are in some instances pledged directly on the contrary side ? I do not mention this as a matter of reproach, but only to show you how very impossible it is for anybody who is *not one of you*, to enter into your ideas and objects of opposition." — *Memoirs of Fox*, vol. i. p. 208.

letters appear to have passed between the two friends on questions in which they must have felt the deepest interest, and been most anxious to consult each other. Burke never, during an autumn recess, habitually confided his thoughts on passing events to Fox, in a correspondence like that which he so regularly then maintained with Lord Rockingham, and afterwards with Dr. Laurence. He never, during a season, spent his nights in the fashionable Clubs, where all Fox's hours of leisure were thrown away in every kind of dissipation. Already it was observed that their intimacy began and ended at the entrance to the lobby of the Commons.*

After the House had broken up, the habits of the two men were in direct contrast. From the House of Commons to the faro-table, from the faro-table to Newmarket, and from Newmarket again to the House of Commons, were still as much as ever to Fox direct and natural transitions. In his unpretending house in Charles-street, St. James's, Burke lived a thoroughly domestic life. It was whispered that his circumstances were very narrow, and that he was under heavy pecuniary obligations to Lord Rockingham; no surprise was therefore excited that at home he saw little company, that he gave no great entertainments, or that when he did invite a few friends to dinner, it was, as he declared, to partake of his own mutton from Beaconsfield, which frequently constituted the most substantial dish at the table. He understood his own position, and with real greatness of mind confined his pretensions within these more humble boundaries. Far from aspiring to ape the habits and magnificence of his great aristocratic friends, he was content and proud to be plain Mr. Ed-

* Wraxall's *Hist. Mem.*, vol. ii. p. 280.

mund Burke, with no claims to rank nor wealth, with nothing but his virtues and abilities to attract the eyes of mankind.

The generosity of his heart was not narrowed by his very limited fortune. It was, perhaps, even rendered more expansive by having to overleap these worldly barriers. Incidents have been told of his kindness at this period of his life, as affecting as any that have been preserved of those earlier days, when it might be presumed that the illusions of youth quickened the impulses of benevolence. On walking home one night from the House of Commons, he was accosted by one of those wretched women who infest the public thoroughfares of a great town. Finding that the man she addressed was of a character different from that of her usual associates, she burst into tears, and told him her very painful history. It was of course the ordinary tale of seduction, more than ordinarily pathetic: a lady's-maid—the lady's son—desertion—destitution—the streets. As she was talking to him, Burke arrived at his own door. There was something in the degraded object's language that struck him as sincere. Solemnly admonishing her that everything might depend upon herself, he called his house-keeper, and told her to take care of the unhappy stranger, until she could be seen by Mrs. Burke. The next day, this kind lady, always ready to second her husband in his humane designs, saw the poor woman. The opportunity of amendment was afforded her, and eagerly embraced. Her benefactor had no reason to repent of his effort to save, from absolute despair, this cowering outcast of the London streets.

His ministering hand was at the same period stretched

out to save a more interesting sufferer from a similar blank despair. About the time when he was offering his last half-guinea to poor Emin, there was born, among the miserable hovels of the pilots and fishermen who then constituted almost the whole population of the borough of Aldborough, on the coast of Suffolk, a child of singular endowments. He was the eldest son of the passionate salt-master of the place. From his earliest years his eyes were inured to the wretchedness and misery of the poor. On the sands and shingles, washed daily by the waves of the German Ocean, as the fisherman mended his nets for the enterprise of the coming night, and the pilot paced to and fro, and watched for the first indications of a sail on the distant horizon, the boy, sitting with a book in his hand on an overturned boat, surrounded by anchors, cables, baskets, and oars, and inhaling, with the fresh breezes of the ocean, the smell of the seaweed and the less fragrant odours of pitch and tar, began to entertain, with a stern and passionate love of this rude nature, and ruder characters, a vague desire to express his thoughts in verse.

His circumstances were, however, but little favourable to poetic cultivation. In his fourteenth year he was taken from listening to the tales of sailors' wives about storms and shipwrecks, from running along the rocks, from musing on the shore, and from watching the lapwing and the curlew in their flight, and sent away to be a surgeon's apprentice. In his eighteenth year he fell in love with a young lady deserving of all his devotion, and the pure and ardent attachment of the youthful poet to Sarah Elmy gave a new impulse to his being. In his twentieth year, after studying and rhyming, under the influence of this gentle monitor until the period of his

apprenticeship expired, not being able to find the means of completing his studies in London, the young man was obliged to return home, and, in the dress of an ordinary labourer, employ himself in the drudgery of piling up butter-casks in his father's warehouse. He at last managed to embark in a sloop for the metropolis. But after residing some months in the neighbourhood of Whitechapel, he was compelled, without having fully accomplished the object of finishing his education as a surgeon, to return to Aldborough.

He then engaged himself as an apothecary's assistant. His employer leaving the town, he set up to practise on his own account ; but suffered all the anxieties of a sensitive mind, conscious of being imperfectly qualified to perform the more serious professional duties which at any moment he might be called upon to undertake. Love, genuine, considerate, and tender, sustained him amid many disappointments, humiliations, and sorrows ; and comforted him especially in those dark and cheerless hours which attend the musings of genius denied its proper sphere. Gazing one day into a muddy pond, which seemed as clouded as his own destiny, the poet determined to abandon his profession as a surgeon, and, with some manuscript verses in his trunk, to seek his fortune in London. He would venture all ; he might lose all ; he would at least brave all.

With five guineas, borrowed from a friend, and the affectionate encouragement of his affianced bride, he again set forth on a voyage to the great city. He took lodgings at a haberdasher's, near the Exchange, and set to work resolutely at his manuscripts. Months passed away. He found himself without money. He found himself without friends. Publishers declined the poems

of the unknown author. He was deprived of the profits of an anonymous production by the failure of the man who had ushered it into the world. To supply his merest necessities, he was compelled to dispose of his watch and his books. He detailed in a journal for Miss Elmy, all his severe distresses, addressing her sometimes under the classical euphemism of Mira, and at others under the more homely name of Sally, and recording his humiliating visits to the book-stall and the pawnbroker's shop. He wrote to Lord North; but after weeks of delay, in which he suffered all that sickness of heart which has been familiarly said to attend on hope deferred, received a cold refusal of his application from the hands of an insolent servant. He sent some lines to Lord Thurlow; but they only obtained for him the surly answer that the Chancellor had no leisure to read verses. He enclosed several of his pieces to Lord Shelburne, trusting confidently in a better reception from a nobleman whom he had heard spoken of as pre-eminently the most liberal patron of authors; but to him the assistance of the accomplished Earl was denied, and he sang the praises of Shelburne in vain.

Nearly a year had gone since, in the April of 1780, he arrived in London. The poor poet's circumstances had grown worse and worse. All his resources were at an end. To save himself from arrest, he had given a bill of exchange, on the payment of which he could only by the most earnest entreaty obtain a week's further delay. His dreams of happiness, love, wealth, and renown, seemed about to terminate in a prison. At last it struck him there was a man then standing out in bold relief, at once as a statesman and author, whose clo-

quent sentiments could only proceed from a mind truly liberal and enlarged. He wrote to Burke, pathetically detailing his misfortunes, transmitting some proposals for a poem then in the press, and earnestly requesting aid.* From the time of leaving this letter at Burke's residence there was to the poet a period of agonizing suspense. To the last day of his life he had reason to remember his painful thoughts that night on Westminster Bridge. With a fluttering heart he presented himself the next day at the statesman's door. No pen could describe the sensation of relief he experienced on being informed that "Mr. Burke would see him."

Burke's mind, on reading the letter and its poetical enclosures, could not but revert to the time when he, with not dissimilar aspirations, first came to London as a student of law. Some of his own trials and struggles in his early literary career once more vividly presented themselves to his imagination. He read the verses with interest, and saw that, with all their crudities of thought and expression, they were the productions of an original genius. "A poet—a true poet!" exclaimed with delight the careworn statesman. The first interview was most satisfactory. Burke became to Crabbe all that he had been to Emin and to Barry. He took the poet down to Beaconsfield, domesticating him under his own roof, and superintending his progress in composition, as though the son of the humble custom-house officer at Aldborough had been his own child. He carried his corrected manuscripts to Dodsley. He introduced him to Reynolds; he introduced him to Johnson. In the uproar and excitement of the political emergency, he carefully pondered on the means of

* See the letter in Crabbe's *Life and Works*, vol. i. p. 91, edit. 1834.

placing the young man above the precarious contingencies of a literary life in London. He declared that his new acquaintance had the manners and feelings of a gentleman; and as a gentleman and a friend, and not as a dependant who had for the time to subsist altogether on his bounty, did the great orator and philosopher continue to treat the poet whom he had saved from the last extremity of worldly misery.

Mrs. Burke nobly assisted her husband in relieving the young man's distresses, and in preventing him from feeling the humiliation of patronage. One day, in expectation of some aristocratic visitors from London, there had been prepared for the table at Beaconsfield an expensive dish, which, as the guests did not appear, the servants thought of reserving for another occasion. After the family had sat down at the table, Mrs. Burke inquired for the missing dish. The butler answered that it had been kept back because the company had not come. "What!" said this real lady, "is not Mr. Crabbe here? Let it be brought up immediately."*

Most of the incidents attending Burke's kindness to Crabbe have been long known. But no history of the statesman's life could be considered complete without a narrative of these affecting circumstances, which in many respects coincide so closely with the similar relationship in which Burke stood to Emin. Since those days, more than a quarter of a century had gone. Instead of being a young author, Burke had become the most prominent politician of the generation. Yet the matured experience of age, the proud consciousness of a name filling all lands, and the moral certainty of speedily attaining one of the highest positions in the State, had in no degree

* Crabbe's *Life and Works*, vol. i. p. 99.

impaired the kindness of his heart. What he was in 1755, when preparing his *Imitation of Bolingbroke*, and his *Treatise on the Sublime and Beautiful* for the press, he was in 1781, when in the heat of the final struggle against Lord North, displaying the rarest powers of an eloquent orator and consummate statesman, and appeared on the eve of achieving the most decisive of political victories.

Even those who would exalt, according to their peculiar idiosyncrasies, either a Bolingbroke, a Walpole, a Chatham, a Fox, a Sheridan, or a Pitt, to the same lofty level as Burke for oratory and statesmanship, must be compelled at least to admit, that there are no philanthropic actions recorded of any one of those eminent public men to be compared with those of Burke. In that respect, he cannot even for a moment be paralleled. Yet what then are the triumphs of the orator? And what then are the achievements of the statesman? In estimating the moral worth of any human being as an individual, one action of genuine philanthropy is worth them all. It deserves to be blazoned in undying lustre when the records of oratory are lost, and the mightiest empires have perished.

The British Empire seemed at that time very nearly perishing. All expectations of conquering the American Colonies were at length given up. The French flag waved over some of the finest British possessions in the West Indies; and Jamaica, the noble acquisition of Cromwell's victorious sway, seemed also on the point of falling into the hands of our enemies. Ireland, with daily increasing confidence in her army of volunteers, and flushed with the recent victory over her haughty mistress, was daily rising in her demands. Gibraltar,

ever since the Spanish declaration of war, had been the principal object of the Court of Madrid ; and all the ability of the Governor, General Elliot, and the gallant band of soldiers who, under his command, defended the fortress, seemed insufficient to hinder this trophy of British superiority, at the entrance of the Mediterranean, from being surrendered to the powerful forces by which it was threatened both by sea and land. The French harbours of Cadiz and Brest were full of English prizes, which clearly showed that even in the Channel, and near our own shores, the British navy could no longer protect the British commerce. The Funds had fallen very low, and were still gradually sinking lower. Hitherto, on all sides but one, under the attacks of our enemies, and through an incapable Administration, the whole fabric of an immense empire appeared on the point of falling to pieces.

Ministers, Members of Parliament, and the whole public out-of-doors, were appalled on learning, in the April of 1781, that even in the East, where the imperial splendour of England had still continued to shine forth even more brilliantly than ever amid the universal gloom with which it was surrounded, this only remaining glory was suddenly menaced with a bloody eclipse.*

In the course of the preceding year William Burke, as the agent of the King of Tanjore, had temporarily sojourned again in England. Notwithstanding the indignation of Parliament, the abuses of administration had continued in the Presidency of Madras quite as flagrant as they had been at the time when the former Governor, Lord Pigot, had been confined and died in imprisonment. Corruption had assumed the grossest

* See Wraxall's Hist. Mem., vol. ii. p. 382.

form. The servants of the Company nominally lent millions to the Nabob of Arcot, whom they inspired with the wildest designs of extending his power throughout the whole of Southern India. To him the territories of all his neighbours were virtually sold by the rapacious English civilians. It was for such an object that the King of Tanjore had been deposed. But William Burke, on returning from the East, pleaded the cause of the Rajah against his enemy, the Nabob of Arcot, so successfully, that he had in the autumn set off once more to India with a very satisfactory letter of assurances from the Government to the Sovereign of Tanjore. He had however scarcely left England, when a resolution directly opposite passed in the Court of Directors, and the King of Tanjore's revenues were handed over to the discretion of the Council at Madras. Though Burke was not at that time even a Member of Parliament, he wrote a most indignant letter on the subject to the Secretaries of State. Ministers were far from thanking him for his interference in Indian affairs, and they considered his epistle as, both in style and spirit, improper and unwarrantable.*

It showed them, however, clearly enough, that his friend William Burke had already inspired him with all his own animosities against the men who held power in Madras. Hastings was not the immediate object of Burke's detestation. The deposition of Lord Pigot, the disposal of the monarchy of Tanjore, the enormous pecuniary transactions between the servants of the Company in the Southern Presidency and the Nabob of Arcot, and the personal interests of William Burke as the Rajah's agent, attracted Burke's attention to the Indian field.

* Correspondence, vol. ii. pp. 390, 395.

But it was only by slow degrees, and after much study and patient inquiry, he became convinced that the Governor-General was the principal offender; and that on the head of this great chief he began to direct all the vehement wrath which less important culprits had originally kindled.

As the trusted informant of his great kinsman on those Indian affairs, William Burke's influence has not been sufficiently recognized. Burke had, since February, been busily engaged in a Select Committee upstairs, on an inquiry into the gross abuses in the administration of justice in Bengal. At this Committee, though General Richard Smith was nominally the chairman, Burke was the leading spirit, and the information he was diligently acquiring was as earnestly used. The news of the second descent of Hyder Ali upon the plains of the Carnatic at this time reached England. It must have confirmed all William Burke's representations of the preceding year, and lent additional energy to the statesman to probe to their inmost recesses the mysteries of iniquity which had disgraced the English name in the province of Madras, and imperilled the British rule from Cape Comorin to the northern extremities of India.

This determination was powerfully manifested when Lord North, on the thirtieth of that month, moved for a Committee of Secrecy to inquire into the causes of this new and unexpected war. Burke made an earnest and impassioned speech, recommending that the inquiry should be open, and intimating that some civil officers of the Company might possibly be found deserving of condign punishment. Sir Thomas Rumbold, the recent Governor of Madras, had just taken his seat in the House of Commons. It was against him that many of

Burke's observations were understood to have been thrown out. Fox adopted his friend's suggestion, and proposed an amendment striking out the word "secrecy" from the Ministerial motion. He was seconded by Burke, who, in alluding to Lord North's ignorance of his own motion, as he rose to speak after he had been roused from his habitual slumbers, humorously appealed from Philip sleeping to Philip awake.*

The amendment was rejected; but Burke, in the course of the debate, might fairly be considered to have opened the trenches against that strong fortress of Indian misgovernment, in besieging which so many years of his remaining life were to be almost exclusively devoted.

The manner in which this Secret Committee was chosen, caused him much indignation. It curiously exemplifies the lax ideas on political morality which the system of the Court and the American war had produced. This was a judicial inquiry: yet every artifice was employed by Lord North to exclude Burke and the most eminent members of the Opposition from the committee; and with one or two insignificant exceptions, it was entirely composed of Ministers and their servile dependants.†

A similar spirit prevailed in all Lord North's dealings with the Company. Misfortunes had not made him wiser. He was still as eager to find a revenue from India, as he had been to conquer one in America. The threats he held out against the Company in the last session, had been steadily maintained; but on the ninth of May he informed the House that satisfactory negotia-

* *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xxii. p. 138.

† *Wraxall's Hist. Mem.*, vol. ii. p. 389.

tions were in progress between Leadenhall-street and Downing-street. He moved that an order for taking these Indian affairs into consideration should be discharged and again renewed in the following week. Burke accused the Minister of insulting the House and tyrannizing over the Company; and he became so warm that he was obliged to express a hope that his vehemence would not be imputed to bad temper, but to a just indignation at the Minister's conduct.*

Finding the difficulties, as Burke foretold him they would be, greater than he expected, Lord North's habitual procrastination prevailed. From week to week the business was postponed. Though resolutions of the most formidable appearance were voted, nothing was effectually done in determining the relations between the Company and the Crown. A temporary measure was again brought in and passed. The Minister, by his delays, was the direct cause of the great Indian Bill of the Coalition Ministry, and of those stormy sessions on Indian affairs which were to keep the whole political world in a state of the most feverish excitement, and alter the relative positions of so many public men.

At the same time a temporary Bill, reforming the judicature of Bengal, was introduced. This, being in obedience to the recommendations of the committee of which he was a member, had as much of Burke's approbation as the absence of all ministerial policy in regard to the East had the reverse. Government in India ought, he maintained, to be adapted to the feelings of the natives. However beautiful the English Constitution might be, it should not be forced upon the Hindoos.†

* Collected Speeches, vol. ii. p. 236.

† Parl. Hist., vol. xxii. pp. 549, 554.

These truths may now appear common-place. At that time they were considered paradoxes. All that he had foretold respecting the unsystematic spirit of the Regulating Act had been so amply fulfilled, that the oppressions of Sir Elijah Impey, the Chief Justice, and his Supreme Court, had been to the Bengalees more terrible than an invasion of the fiercest Mahratta cavalry, and had nearly subverted the British power in Hindostan. The temporary Bill, correcting the most glaring of these abuses, might almost be considered Burke's own measure.

While advocating great reforms in the East Indies, he was not less philanthropic in regard to the West Indies. There a hurricane of the most terrible nature had, during the last autumn, inflicted dreadful calamities. The powerful armaments of contending adversaries had found themselves prostrated before a common and irresistible foe. Bridgetown, the capital of the beautiful and fertile Barbadoes, was almost levelled with the ground. Not a single house was left standing on St. Vincent. Highly cultivated Grenada was suddenly turned into a desert. The men-of-war lying in the most secure anchorage of St. Lucia, were torn from their moorings, driven out to sea, or thrown helplessly upon the rocks. In the French island of Martinico, the town of St. Pierre was completely swept away. The mighty storm, like some furious bird of prey tearing with its beak and striking with its pinions, rushed on, leaving in its course desolation and ruin.

The small Dutch island of St. Eustatius suffered almost as much as Barbadoes and Martinico. Immense wealth was accumulated in that barren and rocky circumference of about thirty miles. It had come to be re-

garded as a free port and as the general magazine of the West Indian Islands; the English, French, and Spanish fleets all there, as in a kind of neutral spot, purchased the supplies which they greatly needed. It had nothing that, except by courtesy, could be called a fort; and some forty or fifty soldiers composed the whole garrison. Early in the year, before the island had recovered from the effects of the devastating hurricane, it was, however, surrounded by the British fleet, under Sir George Rodney, numbering fourteen ships of the line. Resistance being out of the question, the Governor, who could scarcely believe that hostilities were seriously intended, was obliged to surrender at discretion within an hour.

The conquerors were themselves surprised at the value of their acquisition. Unfortunately, the manner in which the power of conquest was abused has left a lasting stain on the memory of the gallant Admiral Rodney. The property of all the merchants in the island was confiscated. The keys of their warehouses, even their ledgers, were taken away. All foreigners were commanded to depart. In this pitiless persecution the Jews, who could be the object of no national hostility, were most hardly treated. They were separated from their families and locked up. Their clothes were stripped from off their backs, and ripped open to discover the hidden gold. The plunder thus shamefully acquired was, in a great measure, sold by public auction. People of all the neighbouring islands flocked to St. Eustatius, to make most advantageous bargains; and they were protected in their purchases, generally destined to supply our enemies, by a British admiral who, forgetting his own honour, and that of the flag under which

he served, sat on a great gun in his cabin, laughing at all threats of lawsuits, and disposing of his spoils like a buccaneer.*

The complaints of the merchants who had suffered in this very comprehensive confiscation, soon followed to England the announcement of the conquest. People were then more enraged at their old allies, the Dutch, than against either the Americans, French, or Spaniards. Nevertheless some of their better feelings awoke at the accounts of this general spoliation. Murmurs against the British Admiral made themselves heard. Burke, who had so long disapproved of the whole war, and had only recently condemned as utterly senseless the policy which had added Holland to the number of our foes, resolved to bring all the circumstances attending the capture of St. Eustatius before the House of Commons. The individual cases of cruelty, the loss, the ruin, the despair of many honest and peaceful persons, powerfully affected his intense sensibility. On the fourteenth of May, he moved for a committee of inquiry into the confiscation of private property in this new acquisition.

The speech was one of his finest efforts. He described the calamities the West Indian Islands were suffering, under the visitation of Providence, when St. Eustatius was subjected to all the extreme barbarities of human hostility ; the physical condition of the island, and the circumstances which had rendered this rocky offshoot of the tropical hemisphere another Tyre amid the waves ; the causes that had led to the surrender of it to a mighty armament against which it was completely defenceless ; and then, with all the colouring of the most pathetic eloquence, that extorted the admiration of his hearers, he

* See Annual Register, 1781, p. 106.

painted the wholesale robberies which had been committed by the British officers, under what they chose to consider as the laws of war.

The Jews were especially the objects of his splendid advocacy. They were, he said, a people peculiarly deserving of kindness from all generous nations ; a people who, being from East to West at once scattered and connected, acted as the links of communication, the electrical conductors of credit, throughout the mercantile world ; a people who, not professing the religion of any State, could not justly be the objects of jealousy to any Government ; a people who, when injured, having not, like the Dutch, the French, or the English, any nation, potentate, country, or armies to fly to for protection and justice, had a claim on Humanity itself as their natural defender and ally.

He related how they first, and the Americans, the French, and the citizens of Amsterdam afterwards, had been plundered and driven from the island. He then entered into a fine dissertation on International Law, discussing all the rights of belligerents and conquerors, and avowing those most humane and enlarged maxims which seem at length, though slowly, being adopted by hostile Governments. He admitted that there was a distinction generally recognized between property on board a ship and property on shore ; but he declared that he could see no reason why goods on land should be respected, and those on sea be confiscated ; and he hoped that the day might not be far distant when this inhumane practice would be abolished. But nothing had been respected at St. Eustatius. He concluded by earnestly and solemnly calling upon the House to interpose ; and by inquiring into this system of general and

indiscriminate confiscation, to save England from unutterable disgrace, and to prevent Europe from again plunging into the horrors of uncivilized war.*

His motion was energetically supported by Fox and other political friends. The American Secretary and the Lord Advocate of Scotland were his leading opponents; but even they had little to say in defence of the conduct he had arraigned, and mainly pleaded the unfairness of condemning in his absence the most successful Admiral that had yet commanded a British fleet in the course of the war. Burke replied in another speech, full of wit and argument. He entreated the House to preserve the honour of the Nation, even though the Empire were about to fall; to save their good name, even though they were to lose their independence.

The motion was rejected by a large majority. The division was far, however, from expressing the feeling of the House. Even Rodney's private friends, while voting against Burke, were secretly affected by the case he had so forcibly brought forward; and they secretly regretted that the Admiral had on this occasion need of their unlimited indulgence. It was remarked, too, that Lord North said nothing, and he was believed to disapprove of what his colleagues thought fit to defend.†

When Burke had once taken up any cause from the impulses of humanity, he was not easily induced to abandon it by defeat. He was determined to renew the subject of St. Eustatius as soon as ever Rodney, who was a Member of Parliament, should appear again in the House of Commons.

* Parl. Hist., vol. xxii. pp. 218-237. Collected Speeches, vol. ii. pp. 244-265.

† Wraxall's Hist. Mem., vol. ii. p. 400.

Other questions of military and naval administration were immediately afterwards the subject of his keenest criticism. He made a singularly humorous speech on the Ordnance Extraordinaires, blaming the extravagance of the Ministers in erecting forts which seemed perfectly invisible, and their negligence in leaving the beleaguered garrison of Gibraltar so short of powder, that Admiral Darby, who had relieved it in the spring, was obliged to strip his ships of their ammunition, to supply General Elliot's immediate necessities. But in the same oration, while advocating economy, he enthusiastically praised the magnificent pile of buildings that were then rising for Government offices on the old ruins of Somerset House, and the erection of the Royal Academy in the same situation. "It was pleasing," he said, "to enter through the portals of a public office, passing on the one hand the seat of elegance and taste, and on the other that of learning and philosophy." Such works were however not the general characteristics of the Ministry. In commenting on these unintelligible estimates, he observed,—

"Where so much sense and skill go hand in hand,
The more we read, the less we understand."

Both his audience and himself laughed at this distich, which he said was quite extempore, and made without having been intended. But he added, with his usual readiness, the line of Juvenal :—

"Si natura negat, facit indignatio versum."*

At the end of the same month of May 1781, Mr. Hartley moved for leave to bring in another Bill to make peace with America. Lord George Germaine said, that the Ministers had as great a stake in the country as the Oppo-

* *Collected Speeches*, vol. ii. p. 271.

sition, and were therefore equally interested in its safety. Burke replied, that if the war was brought to an end, the Ministers would lose their places, which he presumed were their stakes. Between them and the continuance of the war there was a mutually dependent sympathy like that which existed between the porter's breech and the nose of Taliacotius recorded in Hudibras. "They will both," continued Burke, "be extinguished together:

'When life of parent Nock is out,
Off drops the sympathetic snout.'

So, with the present war will their places and pensions very sympathetically expire." The House roared. Even Lord North laughed loudly and immoderately at this apt and ludicrous retort.* Fox spoke ably in support of the motion; but many Members had left town, and the introduction of this pacific Bill from the Opposition side of the House was negatived by a considerable majority.

On this and other questions relating to America, Fox and Burke still fought vigorously and steadily together. On their next great appearance they resumed their early position of direct antagonism, and both spoke and voted against each other.

It was on their old subject of difference, the Marriage Act of 1753. The pertinacity with which Fox ever maintained notions that clearly originated in family prepossessions, and were neither founded on any political principle nor had been formed after any deliberate investigation, was one of the strongest features of his disposition. Lord Beauchamp brought in a Bill to relieve the sufferers from the effects of a clause in Lord Hardwick's enactment relating to the places in which marriages were celebrated, and correcting a misinterpretation which, by a recent de-

* Parl. Hist., vol. xxii. p. 354. Wraxall's Hist. Mem., vol. i. p. 274.

cision of the Judges of the King's Bench, had been shown to exist. Fox, in the course of the discussions, strongly declared himself against the whole of the law. He found however that it was not practicable to engraft the repeal of the measure on Lord Beauchamp's explanatory Bill. But as soon as it was read a third time and passed by the Commons, Fox was loudly called upon to redeem the pledge he had given, by moving for the introduction of a Bill to repeal the original Act. Thus urged, he made the motion, which being agreed to without any very decided opposition, on the eleventh of June, the Bill was brought in and read a first time.

On the second reading, some days afterwards, the opponents of this repeal made their stand. That the law was aristocratic; that marriage was a natural right with which the Legislature had no business to interfere; that on such a question the passion of youth was a better guide than the reason of maturity, were the hazardous propositions which Fox maintained with extraordinary animation and forcible reasoning, and which Burke, assailed, as in 1772, with resplendent rhetoric and consummate wisdom. Fox appeared as the unrivalled debater, bold, sanguine, careless of consequences; Burke as the philosophical statesman, thoughtful, sagacious, profound, looking on human life as it is, and not as lovers, poets, and popular politicians think it ought to be. Fox may have made a better speech than on this occasion: he certainly never made an abler one. The division showed how his influence was growing among the Commons. He succeeded in carrying the Bill through the House; but it was thrown out on the second reading by the Lords.

Fox's ascendancy was not owing to any improvement

in his private morals. Horace Walpole, passing one day in his carriage by the statesman's house when the Bill was under discussion, was surprised to see a cart before the door, and porters busily engaged in loading it with rusty coppers and old chests of drawers. Fox's furniture had been seized by some of his creditors, who, hearing of his recent successes at faro, had adopted this compulsory method to obtain payment of their bills. Just as he arrived at his own door, Walpole met Charles himself, carelessly sauntering along as the happiest individual in the world. Fox came up to the retired wit, entered into an interesting conversation on the Marriage Bill, and appeared utterly indifferent to the interesting ceremony then in operation with respect to his goods and chattels in St. James's-street.*

These debates on the Marriage Act were however but an unexpected and somewhat unseasonable episode at the end of a protracted session. The disagreement then in no degree diminished either the private friendship of Burke and Fox, or the real earnestness with which they strove together to save England from the disgraces and misfortunes of the war.

The Gazette at this time informed the people of another victory in America. It was, however, followed by the difficulties with which those triumphs of the British forces seemed to be inevitably clouded; and was indeed, in this single instance, the type of the whole American war, in which the success of the Royal arms was unaccompanied with its usual results; a battle won was scarcely more advantageous than a battle lost, and to conquer was not to subdue.

Since the victory at Camden, months had elapsed

* Walpole's Collected Letters, vol. vi. p. 124.

without any important event in the southern provinces. A kind of partisan warfare, with varying fortune, had indeed continued ; but it was not until the early months of 1781, that Cornwallis and Greene found themselves face to face with each other, and a keen contest of generalship was begun, in which the prize was nothing less than the final issue of the war on the American continent. Adopting the Fabian policy of avoiding a conflict, the American General retreated northward to the river Dan, over which he crossed into Virginia. He was pursued to the borders of this province by Cornwallis, who then made a retrograde movement, established himself at Hillsborough, and issued a proclamation inviting all loyal subjects of his Majesty to hasten with arms and provisions to the royal standard, and aid in treading out the embers of rebellion. Alarmed at the reported effect of the British manifesto, Greene doubled on his course, recrossed the Dan, and returned into North Carolina. There was much manoeuvring and skirmishing between the two armies. Cornwallis was anxious to force his adversary to an engagement. Greene, expecting considerable reinforcements, again fell back to avoid a general action. These American levies at length reached their General. His troops were more than double the number of their adversaries, and rumour exaggerated their force to even four times their strength. Undeterred by this immense superiority, the British Commander, on the fifteenth of March, attacked Greene at Guildford, inflicted upon him a total defeat, and even captured his artillery. According to all the ordinary rules of political arithmetic, what might not naturally have been expected to follow after such a signal achievement ? It was attended with all the consequences

of a defeat. A fourth of the British General's little band being disabled, the soldiers without food, and the horses without forage, he was obliged to leave some of his wounded to the mercy of the enemy, and to retreat two hundred miles to Wilmington, that he might be near the sea, and in an emergency draw supplies from the fleet. The defeated Greene pursued the victorious Cornwallis. There was to the British cause nothing of victory but the name.

Parliament had not adjourned in the summer, when the despatches from Cornwallis were published, announcing the battle of Guildford and its apparently paradoxical results. They occasioned the last and most important debate on American affairs in the course of this long Session. Fox appeared with the *Gazette* in his hand, and arguing from Cornwallis's own admissions, that the subjugation of America was quite impossible, moved, on the twelfth of June, that the Ministers ought immediately to take every possible means to conclude a peace with the Colonies. Every feature of the American contest was earnestly discussed. Burgoyne again recounted his experiences in that campaign which had so disastrously terminated at Saratoga. Some of the country gentlemen bitterly accused Lord North of deceiving them, and declared that they would no longer support the struggle. One noble enthusiast, Lord Westcote, however, went so far as to call the war Holy. He was majestically rebuked by Pitt, who spoke nobly for the third time, and appeared to the shrewd Rigby and the wary Dundas as the minister of the future. Lord North took no part in the defence of his government. He left Lord George Germaine to bear the whole brunt of the debate, and unmistakably showed his misgivings about

the campaign on which Cornwallis had entered, of which the Opposition sanguinely predicted the failure, and to which they looked forward as the death-blow of the Ministry.*

The motion was defeated, but the opponents of the Government were not discouraged. George Byng, the Member for Middlesex, was called their Mustermaster-General. In virtue of his office, before the prorogation he took the opportunity of exhorting them to attend early in the next Session, to put an end to the wicked war, and to decide the fate of the incompetent Ministry, which, unless all human calculation should be falsified, was at last inevitably doomed. But some of the adherents of the Government could scarcely believe that what had hitherto stood so long in defiance of Burke's eloquence, Fox's logic, and an uninterrupted train of the most humiliating disasters, might not stand some time longer, and they were still ready to brave the anger of their opponents. A petition was presented from American prisoners confined at Plymouth, complaining of the severity with which they were treated. Fox then, as throughout this period, wearing his dingy suit of blue and buff, was keenly taunted by Mansfield, the Solicitor-General, for parading himself in the uniform of the rebels. Burke defended his friend, and warmly supported the petition.†

It was his last Parliamentary act before the session closed. He had, however, not left town for Beaconsfield before he thought of endeavouring to effect the release of more illustrious sufferers from the war, and was actively prosecuting his usual mission of humanity, in the case of his friend General Burgoyne.

* Wraxall's *Hist. Mem.*, vol. ii. p. 416.

† *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xxii. p. 611.

CHAPTER XXX.

1781-1782.

STORM AND VICTORY.

BURGOYNE's position in the ranks of Opposition had long been most peculiar. Though some years had passed away since he had returned to England as a prisoner on parole, a prisoner on parole he still continued. So active a part had he taken in exposing the delusions which the Ministers so much encouraged, about the number of loyalists remaining in the United States, that he had given great offence to the Court; and it was believed that the British Government would rather do anything to send him back into captivity, than enter sincerely into a negotiation to effect his release.

Every obstacle was thrown in the way of accomplishing a satisfactory exchange. In the course of his campaign, General Burgoyne had taken some Americans prisoners, whom, fearing that they might be massacred by his savage allies, he had permitted to escape, on the understanding that an equal number of British prisoners should afterwards be given up. The Congress refused to fulfil this agreement. They offered however to release General Burgoyne for two thousand one hundred men; but as the English Ministers insisted that the Americans released by Burgoyne should form part of the equivalent, the negotiations had come to nothing.

Wishing to get rid of Burgoyne from the House of Commons, in which his military knowledge and American experiences were of the greatest service to his friends, Lord George Germaine had even commanded him to return to America as a prisoner of war. Burgoyne resigned his valuable employments under the Crown, and was, by the Opposition, regarded, like Keppel, as the victim of his political conduct. He might not be a great soldier ; but he was eminently a gallant, refined, and accomplished man. Being now, however, advanced in years, his fine figure began to stoop, and his vigorous constitution to give indications of approaching decay.* But his polished manners and high spirits were still the delight of younger men. Through the persecutions he was supposed to have undergone, his cause had been powerfully upheld by Fox and Burke. The two friends were therefore highly indignant on learning, at the beginning of the recess, that Washington had demanded the return to confinement of the unfortunate English General, who appeared thus to be the object of oppression, both by the Americans against whom he had fought and by the Government under which he had served.

Burke determined to apply to Dr. Franklin on this subject. The Pennsylvanian was still the chief American Minister at the court of Versailles, whence, as year succeeded year, he had seen the indignities which he had undergone before the Privy Council in the Cockpit at Whitehall, amply avenged. Burke drew up an admirable letter, reminding the Doctor of their former friendship, eulogizing the character and abilities of Burgoyne, and earnestly requesting Franklin's interposition in favour of the persecuted General. " You, my dear Sir," wrote

* Wraxall's Hist. Mem., vol. ii. p. 292.

Burke, "who have made such astonishing exertions in the cause which you espouse, and are so deeply read in human nature and in human morals, know better than anybody that men will, and that sometimes they are bound to take, very different views and measures of their duty from local and from professional situation ; and that we may all have equal merit in extremely different lines of conduct. In this piece of experimental philosophy I run no risk of offending you. I apply not to the Ambassador of America, but to Dr. Franklin, the philosopher, the friend and the lover of his species."*

Before despatching this characteristic epistle to France, Burke sent it to Bath for the perusal of Burgoyne. There the General and Fox were spending the first weeks of the political vacation. Charles was about to drink the waters and begin a course of regularity which his dissipated manner of living in London rendered only too necessary in the autumnal recess. They both highly approved of the letter, and assured Burke that it would be of essential service. He then transmitted it to Paris ; but some anxious weeks passed away before he received any intimation of the effect it had produced.

They were weeks of great anxiety and not a little humiliation to all patriotic Englishmen. Early in August there was fought off the Doggerbank a fierce and doubtful action between an English fleet, commanded by Admiral Hyde Parker, and a Dutch fleet which had been sent out to accompany a rich convoy to the Baltic. This engagement resembled in many respects the bloody sea fights between the same rivals in the reign of Charles the Second. The combatants fought until the ships became quite unmanageable, and were separated by the waves, on

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 423.

which they drifted helplessly, like mere logs of wood. Both sides claimed the victory. As soon as Parker arrived at the Nore with his shattered vessels, George III., accompanied by the Prince of Wales, went down to welcome him, received him with every testimony of approbation, offered him any promotion, and even invited him to dine on board the royal yacht. Mortified, however, at being sent out with so small a fleet to encounter a superior enemy, while there were several line-of-battle ships lying idly at anchor in the Downs, the rough old sailor, like Keppel, Howe, and almost every other able officer then in the Service, was disgusted with Lord Sandwich's naval administration, and felt that his honour was not safe in such hands. "I wish your Majesty younger officers and better ships. I am grown too old for the service," he said bluntly to George III., and, notwithstanding all the gracious blandishments of his Sovereign, persisted in resigning his command.*

Similar want of preparation and absence of forethought were everywhere displayed. The combined fleets of France and Spain appeared at this season as regularly off the British coasts as swallows at the approach of summer. Periodical, however, as these visits were, and although valuable commercial fleets were expected home from the Indies, and one not less precious was then ready to sail outward-bound from Cork harbour, the arrival of the enemy was unexpected by the Admiralty, until, with forty-nine ships of war and other vessels, which was said to make their armament number about ninety sail, the navies of the Bourbon Powers formed a line from Ushant to the Scilly Isles, and threatened to block up effectually the Chops of the Channel. Admiral Darby, with the

* *Annual Register, 1782, p. 123.*

home fleet of twenty-one ships, then at sea, was in danger of being cut off. He ran into Torbay. Fox, having left Bath, was at the time at Saltram, whence he went over to Torbay and dined with Captain Jervis on board the *Sir John Ross*. Expecting to see some sport more interesting than even the shooting of partridges, he for the moment forgot differences in politics and the excitement of dissipation, as he beheld the British fleet, in all its magnificent inferiority, calmly preparing to receive the attack of the apparently irresistible foe.*

The French Admiral, however, being overruled in council, the enterprise was abandoned. The Spanish ships were but scarcely seaworthy when the gales of September set in, and the two fleets returned to Brest and Cadiz without having intercepted any important convoy or undertaken any more serious operation than that of protecting an expedition against Minorca.

But this ultimate capture of Minorca by the Allies was but a poor consolation to Spain while the British flag waved above the Rock of Gibraltar. Yet there, despite of an immense weight of artillery, merciless bombardments, and incessant attacks at midnight by gun-boats, the flag of the stubborn islanders still continued to wave. To such extremities had the garrison been reduced before Admiral Darby, in the last April, had succeeded in conveying them supplies, that the officers had been prudently commanded to mount guard with their hair unpowdered; but it is related that this instance of deprivation had an excellent influence in teaching patience and resignation to the common soldiers, who

* Fox's letters on this matter to his friend Fitzpatrick are erroneously attributed by their noble editor to the year 1779. *Memorials and Correspondence of Fox*, vol. i. pp. 231-235.

saw, under the hardships of the siege, the heads of their superiors like their own, reduced to the simple state of unadorned nature.* The defenders of Gibraltar in the uniform of King George, did not foresee a time when the hair-powder, which they considered such a sacrifice in a real gentleman, would only exist as an essential part in the full-dress livery of the genuine flunkey.

Fashions have changed ; but Gibraltar remains as the noble trophy to the gallantry of those British soldiers who resolutely maintained it at a time when all the world seemed to be combined together for the dismemberment of the British dominions. In the course of a few days of continued firing, seventy-five thousand shot and twenty-five thousand shells had been discharged against the devoted fortress. The town was reduced to ashes ; the miserable inhabitants were ruined. But the rock, vomiting forth flames of fire against all assailants, gave the summons to surrender a very audible negative from the mouths of its guns, which re-echoed like thunder amid the surrounding hills of Barbary and Spain. Then there came a pause in hostilities. The Spaniards at this time set about erecting still more enormous works, which they supposed would render the reduction of the fortress a matter of certainty, and of which the brave General Elliott, who united the coolest prudence with the most daring enterprise, was only waiting the completion, to sally out against and destroy ; a success which would render fruitless for a time all the endeavours and hopes of Spain to wrest from a stronger and more imperial race the priceless possession, of which the loss has ever remained so mortifying to the pride that has alone survived all the glories of Charles V. and Philip II.

* Annual Register, 1782, p. 100. Drinkwater's Siege of Gibraltar, p. 57.

England, on the contrary, perhaps appeared in reality more glorious this autumn, as she stood at bay, meeting on every side her innumerable enemies, than she had ever been even in the most triumphant period of the Seven Years' War. There is nothing to be said for the foolish Court and the miserable Government which brought affairs into such a condition ; but much may be said for the high spirit of the nation that could in every part of the world wage, on an appearance of equality, even a defensive war against such a multitude of foes ; and in this tremendous season, putting the policy of these wars out of sight, an Englishman, as he contemplates the efforts she boldly made, may be justly proud of his country. That greatness which could stand erect after receiving blow upon blow from so many antagonists, each of whom had separately been considered worthy of her, must indeed have been established on solid foundations. Formidable as the crisis was, it at least showed to all the universe, that the blood of England was good, that she was mettle to the backbone. Even in America, and when fighting against her own children, she had been victorious in every pitched battle ; and she was only at last yielding to the insuperable military difficulty which Burke had so frequently pointed out, of subduing with a handful of men an immense continent inhabited by a people as brave, as enterprising, and as resolute as her own. In the West Indies she had recently lost Pensacola to Spain, and would lose Tobago to France ; but she more than held her own in the East Indies, and the combined fleets could effect nothing against her in her own seas.

France and Spain were also contending for principles which ultimately overwhelmed their august thrones as

with the blasts of a tornado. Even the noble cause for which the Americans fought, has by their descendants been permitted to degenerate into something worse than the worst Toryism of George III., in their attempts to combine, in a most demoralizing compromise, the republican freedom of the Saxon, with the established slavery of the African. Far different in the same period has been the fate and conduct of England. She stood firm throughout the revolutionary hurricane. She has admitted her errors and done penance for her guilt, with regard to her American Colonies. She has enfranchised her slaves. Her greatest statesmen, instructed by the wisdom and emulating the example of Burke, have earnestly laboured to remove every penal disqualification from the Statute Book, and to render every British subject equal before the law. Revolutions have been prevented by their causes having been removed, until even the impartial theorist, whatever may have been his political prepossessions, has felt himself compelled to admit that the liberty of the time-honoured English monarchy is, both philosophically and practically, much more consistent and comprehensive than that of the young American Republic.

Yet few persons, in the recess of 1781, could look forward to such a result. Waging a hopeless contest in the North and South, in the East and West, in both hemispheres, in every latitude, by land and sea; as the net was being woven round Cornwallis and his gallant band, with such enormous interest then on the hazard of the die, we almost wonder how Englishmen at home could bear the excitement of the struggle, either eat, sleep, perform their daily duties, or even manage to exist at all.

But this would be a great misconception. There was doubtless much public spirit; but there was also much

public insensibility. The multitude, either of the rich or poor, either of the fashionable or vulgar, are seldom powerfully affected with anything but what comes under their immediate experience. To them the American war was an abstraction, and an abstraction that had lost the charm of novelty. A wet or cold day, a full purse or an empty stomach, a personal gratification or a domestic sorrow, were circumstances which, with the great majority, had much more influence than *Gazettes* announcing the successful defence of Gibraltar, the fateful march of Cornwallis into Virginia, or the anticipated loss of Minorca. People quarrelled and became friends, bought and sold, made merry and formed parties of pleasure, sent their children to school, and looked for their return at the Christmas holidays, flirted, danced, were married, and died, and the hour ran through each of these eventful autumn days as steadily as in the most halcyon season of prosperous peace. All contemporary writers agree in showing that there never was a time of greater dissipation, than at the climax of this American war, when England was staggering in the most awful season through which she has ever emerged. The clubs in St. James's-street were full of the *Maccaroni*. Games of chance, which had been much in fashion thirty years before, were again revived; and fortunes were lost at the gaming table with a recklessness which surprised old men who talked of Carteret and Pulteney. The theatres and opera houses were crowded. Persons of rank, as they went to parties, were robbed by highwaymen, who bowed politely as they rode away with the guineas which their real owners had intended to play with at cards throughout the night, and sometimes far into the next morning. The country squire who quietly rode out to hunt, at the

moment when the Royal and Parliamentary forces were about to engage in the battle of Edgehill, was, as an observer remarked, the perfect representative of the indifference with which many of his contemporaries appeared to regard the jeopardized fortunes of their country in this unparalleled time.*

The votary of Art might indeed feel without reproach a noble serenity. Sir Joshua Reynolds was peaceably making a tour in Flanders while Parker's crippled squadron was arriving at the Nore, and the fleets of France and Spain were blockading the Channel. He began a letter to Burke at the Hague, and resumed it at Amsterdam, and only concluded it at Düsseldorf, calmly recording his impressions of the different towns, and making comments on the works of the Dutch and Flemish masters. The labour and perseverance displayed in the dykes at Amsterdam; the canals in the middle of the streets, and with rows of trees on each side; the astonishing industry shown in erecting the Stadhouse on more than thirteen thousand piles; the little village of Brock, with its streets of the finest sand, houses painted with every prismatic colour, and neat little gardens with the trees cut in every shape; Rubens's masterpieces of the Fallen Angels and the Last Judgment, in the gallery at Düsseldorf, are seen with much delight by Reynolds, and indicated to his friend in the epistle full of the gentle and genial nature of the great artist, undisturbed by all the bloodshed and discord of the world. He was particularly pleased with the Hague, which he considered like Bath; and "with

* Walpole to Mason, June 14, 1781. Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 188. See also Walpole's Letters, *passim*, in the year 1781, and Wilberforce's Life, by his Sons, vol. i. p. 16.

the squares, with which," he wrote to Burke, "you would be charmed, as they are full of trees."*

On the same day when Sir Joshua was finishing this letter, Crabbe, whom Burke had mentioned to Reynolds with the merited eulogy, "he has the mind and feelings of a gentleman," was also writing to his kind protector at Beaconsfield.

The poet was diligently studying at Beccles. While walking together through the woods and fields of his farm, Burke had gradually heard from Crabbe all the particulars of his life, and had drawn from him the avowal that one great object of his ambition was, to qualify himself for the sacred ministry of the Church. The patron at once saw a path of comfort and usefulness, for which Crabbe's disposition admirably fitted him, before the young poet, and which would render him independent of the caprice of the public, the perspicacity of publishers, and all the illusions of literary renown. "It is most fortunate," said Burke, "that your father exerted himself to send you to that second school; without a little Latin, we should have made nothing of you; now, I think we shall succeed."† Crabbe, under the advice of his patron, set himself to a more serious study than that of English poetry. Burke looked out for a friendly prelate by whom the irregular education of his young dependant might not be regarded as an insurmountable obstacle to ordination. All his influence, and that of other friends, was employed with Dr. Yonge, the Bishop of Norwich; and the only anxiety of Crabbe was, lest his merit might be insufficient to justify such powerful recommendations. Looking forward to his union with Miss Elmy, among whose relatives he was residing, he wrote to Burke: "It

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 425. † Crabbe's Life, p. 97.

is not my happiness only ; perhaps, Sir, not mine chiefly, that you promote. The family I am with admire, honour, and indeed venerate the excellent friend of one to whom they have been long partial. Gratitude is more pleasing than admiration ; and, selfish in our virtues, we are thankful to our friend, and almost forget that he is the friend of all.”*

He was indeed the friend of all. A struggling individual, or a race labouring under centuries of oppression, were equally the objects of his sympathizing benevolence ; and to him, as their common protector, they in all their difficulties instinctively turned.

When the Bourbon fleets were in the Channel, there was a great terror of an invasion in Ireland. Cork, where the rich fleet for Jamaica had taken shelter, was believed to be in imminent danger ; and as the French were almost daily expected, the current coin nearly all disappeared. The Commander-in-Chief of the British troops was in the greatest distress for ready money. In this emergency, George Goold, a Roman Catholic, took the responsibility upon himself of supplying the General with some thousand guineas, and offered his whole fortune for his Majesty’s service. With him others of the same persuasion zealously co-operated. They were especially thanked by the Commander-in-Chief and by the Lord Lieutenant, and assured that the King should be made acquainted with this remarkable instance of Catholic devotion. But it was to Burke that Mr. Goold wrote during this September, and enclosed, as soon as he had received them, the letters of the Commander-in-Chief, acknowledging his services and communicating the approbation of the Viceroy, because the generous merchant

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 430.

knew that it was to Burke, as the great champion of toleration, that the acknowledgments by the Government of obligations to the Irish Catholics, as testifying to their loyalty, and confirming his own views, would give the most sincere pleasure.* And it was to Burke that, almost at the same time, Lord Petre sent off, as soon as ever it reached his hands, an edict of toleration which the philosophic but unfortunate Emperor Joseph the Second had just published, after the death of his heroic but somewhat bigoted mother, Maria Theresa, and which this noble correspondent wished by Burke's influence to see circulated through the press, with notes, as a contrast to the foolish system of Lord George Gordon and his ignorant followers.

Burke thanked Lord Petre for sending him this new instance of liberality and justice. He related to this nobleman in return the generous conduct of the Roman Catholic merchants at Cork, when the combined enemies were supposed to be off the coast ; and while hoping that such behaviour would render some service to the cause, he regretted that the principle of toleration, owing to the apathy of the Government and the blindness of the multitude, appeared to be less advanced than it had been when the Bill was passed which had recently been made the pretext of such an outbreak of violence and fanaticism. “A storm,” said he, “came upon us in the early spring of our toleration, and whilst it was shooting out its first tender buds. They had not strength enough to sustain it. Neither our understandings nor our hearts are amiss, but we want courage and decision of mind ; and the grand principles of justice and policy are not dear enough to us to carry us through the difficulties which we should

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 432.

encounter hardly for a paltry job. As to myself, as far as my little efforts go, my sentiments are always the same; and from whatever quarter a good thing comes, it shall have my most cordial support.*

While welcoming every indication of political amelioration, and corresponding on such multifarious topics, all of which however tended to promote the welfare of his fellow-creatures, either individually or collectively, he was also extremely anxious about the case of General Burgoyne, and surprised that after more than two months elapsed he as yet had no reply to his private application to Franklin. It was not until November that a letter in the Doctor's handwriting reached Burke at Beaconsfield. Their correspondence had been very unfortunate. Owing to Franklin's absence from Paris, he had not received Burke's epistle until October, and owing to some other cause of delay, Burke only received the answer a month after it had been written.

It was however in some respects satisfactory. Franklin cordially reciprocated all the good feeling Burke had expressed, assured him that the Congress did not wish to persecute Burgoyne, and supposed that the demand for his recall had only been made to give effect to their offer of exchanging him for their late President, Mr. Henry Laurens, then a prisoner in the Tower. The philosopher enclosed to Burke a resolution of Congress to that effect, and empowered him, according to his pleasure, to undertake the negotiation with the English Ministers.

This negotiation was not however such a matter of course as Franklin believed. Burke for a time was very much perplexed. As the English Government did not really wish to see Burgoyne released, they were not likely

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 437.

to go out of their way to effect this object at the request of a political opponent. Besides, there were legal difficulties in the case of Laurens, rendering his direct exchange for a military officer most objectionable to all official pedants. He was not himself a military man, neither did he come within the category of a prisoner of war. As a civilian captured on the high seas when proceeding to negotiate a treaty between the United States and the Dutch, and as having acted as President of that Congress which, as a representative body, officially made war against the mother country ; he was of course technically guilty of high treason, and could not easily be exchanged under the provisions of a cartel. Burke felt that at the moment his interference would rather double-lock the door upon the ex-President in the Tower, and render Burgoyne's release more difficult, than carry out the particular exchange that the Congress had proposed. He therefore paused, because, under the circumstances, nothing at all likely to be advantageous could be done.

The delay was politic. At that time important tidings, quite decisive of the American war, and utterly conclusive against carrying into practice any design which the King or his Ministers may have entertained of bringing the ex-President Laurens to the block on Tower Hill, were fast being borne on the wings of the wind from Virginia to England.

The Ministry had been severely censured by the Opposition for permitting as usual, without molestation, a great French fleet, in the spring, to leave Brest ; one portion, under Suffrein, separated for the coast of Coromandel, and the more powerful division, under the Count de Grasse, composed of twenty ships of the line, made all sail for the West Indies. The defenders of Lord Sand-

wich answered to all criticism, that the most essential object was at that time the relief of Gibraltar, and that to accomplish this result, the Government was obliged to neglect other operations, however important. Whatever truth there might be in this reply, it was on the powerful fleet which De Grasse commanded that, as on a wheel of fortune, the whole American war finally revolved.

The first consequence was, to give the French again, on joining with another fleet at Martinico, an absolute superiority in the West Indies. Rodney was still reveling in the spoils of St. Eustatius. He left to a subordinate officer, Sir Samuel Hood, the endeavour, which was unsuccessful, to intercept an enemy whose strength exceeded his expectation. Being repulsed in an attempt to reconquer St. Lucia, De Grasse succeeded however in reducing Tobago. With twenty-eight line-of-battle ships, which Rodney did not venture to meet, the French Admiral swept proudly to leeward through the whole extent of the West Indian seas. He then sailed round to co-operate in the Bay of Chesapeake with the French and American forces in Virginia. This was the point to which all the military and naval operations appeared to be simultaneously converging. The stage was being darkened and the scene was growing crowded, as the plot rapidly thickened, and the great catastrophe of this exciting drama was at length to be brought about.*

Late in April, Lord Cornwallis had broken up his camp at Wilmington. He marched to Virginia for the purpose of co-operating with another force under Generals Philips and Arnold. By the reduction of this central province, it was expected that the subjugation of the Southern Colonies would be complete ; and in any event

* See Annual Register, 1781, p. 90.

a place of arms might be formed, commanding one of the large rivers; and the undisputed control of the Bay of Chesapeake rendered certain to the British Navy. As Sir Henry Clinton, the Commander-in-Chief, expected to be attacked at New York by Washington, and as powerful reinforcements soon reached Lafayette and the Americans in Virginia, Cornwallis reluctantly abandoned the idea of carrying on an offensive war. He at length established himself at Yorktown, a place on the River York, and opposite Gloucester Point, which, in pursuance of a favourite design of the Ministers at home, he, as the summer advanced and the heats set in, deliberately proceeded to fortify.

But while the British General was leisurely strengthening his posts, and felt secure of his position, Washington was playing a skilful game. On being joined by the Count Rochambeau with French troops from Rhode Island, he spared no trouble to encourage the expectation that New York continued to be the object of the campaign, long after that intention had been laid aside. He then suddenly crossed the Jerseys, marched upon the Delaware, passed through Philadelphia, expeditiously reached the head of the river Elk, and only paused for transports to convey the army to the seat of war in Virginia. Almost at the same moment De Grasse with his fleet arrived at the Chesapeake. Sir Samuel Hood, with nineteen sail of the line, also made the American coast from the West Indies; but his arrival had not been expected at the moment, and the opportunity was lost of destroying a French armament in the voyage from Rhode Island to unite with De Grasse. The enemy had an undisputed superiority. Nevertheless another undecisive action, one of the last of the kind in a war

of which such engagements were so prominently the characteristic, was fought early in September. The British fleet accomplished nothing, and returned to New York. The French Commander maintained his position in the Chesapeake, satisfied with blocking up all communication by sea with York Town, and with protecting the arrival from Rhode Island of a powerful siege train, which seemed the messenger of doom to the brave army of Cornwallis.

The loss of the Bay was an event which neither the British Ministers nor the British Generals had foreseen. Late in September, Cornwallis found himself completely surrounded by an army five or six times his strength, commanded by Washington in person, and with a hostile fleet of some twenty-six line-of-battle ships blocking up the passage of the Chesapeake. On the sixth of October the confident assailants opened their trenches. Two redoubts which commanded the whole town were seized on the night of the fourteenth, and, by the break of day, taken into the second parallel. The earthworks could not withstand the heavy fire. Most of the guns were silenced. In vain the anxious eyes of the beleaguered Commander scanned the horizon for a sight of the topmasts of the English fleet approaching to relieve him from the distant bay. He looked for friends, and he saw only enemies. It was hopeless to resist a general assault ; yet the idea of a surrender like that of Burgoyne, was intolerable. A bold attempt was made in the night to escape ; but a violent storm set in, and the boats filled with soldiers were compelled to return. Feeling that further resistance would be only a wanton sacrifice of life, Cornwallis made up his mind to the hard necessity. On the nineteenth of October, the very day on which the British fleet, with Clinton and seven thousand of his best

troops on board, was leaving the harbour of New York, prepared at every risk to force the passage through the Chesapeake and relieve their gallant countrymen, the posts of York and Gloucester were surrendered by Cornwallis; and his band of six thousand seasoned veterans, whom no equal number of their enemies had ever been able to face, with much bitter and unconcealed mortification, laid down their arms and became prisoners of war. Clinton was, five days afterwards, off the Chesapeake. But he was too late. Fortune had powerfully assisted in bringing to a successful issue the scheme, on which no human wisdom could have safely calculated. The American war was at an end.

Nearly five weeks after the surrender at Yorktown, a hackney coach was seen on a Sunday morning, the twenty-fifth of November, leaving the door of Lord George Germaine's mansion in Pall Mall. In that humble vehicle was the noble Secretary himself. He was driving during church-time to communicate to his colleagues the disastrous intelligence which had just arrived at the War Office in Whitehall. He first called on Lord Stormont in Portland-place; and thence the two Ministers drove to the residence of the Lord Chancellor in Great Russell-street. The bold Thurlow, though the keeper of the Royal conscience, was not at his public devotions. These high officials jumped into the same hackney coach, of which the driver was at least in luck that morning, and the three ministers went in a body to the official residence of their chief, in Downing-street. The easy temper which had so often buoyed up Lord North amid the ruin which his policy had inflicted on the country, at last gave way. He saw at a glance the enormity of the crimes he had committed. He saw that no Royal favour

could at last shield him from the deserved reprobation of all future generations in both hemispheres. The news was to him like the receipt of a bullet in his bosom. He stretched forth his arms, and paced wildly to and fro, exclaiming repeatedly, in the deepest agony of mind, “O God! it is all over.”*

The Minister’s situation even appeared more painful, because Parliament had been summoned to meet on the following Tuesday. The Royal Speech had even been settled. Many Members were of course, from the time which travelling then occupied, already on the road to town. It was therefore found, after some consultation, impracticable to put off the evil day when the Government must present itself to the judgment of an angry Legislature. On the Monday morning the serious tidings were known all over London. The defeat and resignation of the Ministry, as soon as ever the House of Commons could come to a division, were confidently anticipated.

These expectations were not realized. The King’s Speech was in much the same tone as it had been ever since the war began. His Majesty was desirous of tranquillity, but would not sacrifice the rights and interests of his empire. The restless ambition of his enemies had first provoked and still prolonged the struggle. On his part, no effort had been wanting to give peace and prosperity to his deluded subjects in America. He had a firm conviction that the cause for which he contended was just; he therefore counted on the protection of Divine Providence; and he called upon the Lords and gentlemen in Parliament assembled to support him in his exertions to restore peace to all his dominions.

This seems absurdly ironical. Yet such was the spirit

* Wraxall’s Hist. Mem., vol. ii. p. 434.

of the production which the Ministers at such a time gravely put into the mouth of their Sovereign. It was appropriately moved and seconded by two very young Members.

Fox immediately rose. He congratulated the mover and seconder on the graceful manner in which they had performed parts that certainly required the benefit of inexperience and the recommendation of ignorance. Then, with the utmost vehemence which language and manner were capable of expressing, he ridiculed the proposed Address ; scornfully denounced the whole conduct of the American war ; alluded very significantly to the scaffold, as the just punishment of those who had carried it on ; accused the Ministers of treachery ; and even called Lord North the Prime Minister of France. He proposed an amendment for a total change of system. Lord North replied to Fox. He spoke scornfully of the insinuations against his honesty ; but there was a sadness and seriousness in the Minister's speech such as he had never before shown, when only to be pleasant was with him to be victorious. The war, he said, might be unfortunate, but it was not unjust. "Should I," he observed, "hereafter mount the scaffold, as I am menaced, in consequence of the part that I have taken in its prosecution, I shall continue to maintain that it was founded in right and dictated by necessity." The Minister could not perhaps say less ; but this was an unguarded declaration.

It immediately summoned up Burke. He was as indignantly vituperative as Fox ; he was even still more passionately eloquent. This maintenance of an abstract right against reason, justice, or policy, had from the first been the object of his powerful condemnation ; he now, at the moment when all that he had before declared

as likely had been proved in the results, fired against this theoretical claim a final volley. Showing, in answer to the Minister, that the contest could not be so fitly called unfortunate as disgraceful, and that the Address in reply to the Royal Speech actually pledged the House to continue this ruinous system, he turned round to the Chair and exclaimed indignantly, “Good God! Mr. Speaker, are we yet to be told of the rights for which we went to war? Oh, excellent rights! Oh, valuable rights! Valuable you should be; for we have paid dear at parting with you! Oh, valuable rights! that have cost Great Britain thirteen provinces, four islands, a hundred thousand men, and more than seventy millions of money! Oh, wonderful rights! that have lost to Great Britain her empire on the ocean; her boasted grand and substantial superiority, which made the world bend before her! Oh, inestimable rights! that have taken from us our rank among nations and our happiness at home; that have taken from us our trade, our manufactures, our wealth; that have reduced us from the most flourishing empire in the world, to be one of the most compact, unenviable powers on the face of the globe! Oh, wonderful rights! that are likely to take from us all that yet remains!” In a similar strain he commented on the infatuation of Ministers thinking of no consequences and forfeiting everything for a right which was nothing without the might to enforce it; and he burst forth with a beautiful illustration, which he had once before indeed more cursorily drawn, of shearing the wolf. “‘Oh!’ says a silly man, full of his prerogative of dominion over a few beasts of the field, ‘there is excellent wool on the back of a wolf, and therefore he must be sheared.’ ‘What! shear a wolf?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘But will he comply? Have

you considered the trouble? Have you calculated the cost? How will you get this wool?' 'Oh, I have thought of nothing, and I will think of nothing but my right: a wolf is an animal that has wool; all animals that have wool are to be shorn; and therefore I will shear the wolf.' This is the noble Lord's reasoning; and this is the counsel he has given."* A great impression was produced by this noble *apologue*, as picturesque in itself as it was eloquent in style and forcible in argument. Even the Members on the Ministerial benches, who were prepared still to give their votes to the Government, gave their involuntary admiration to the great orator of the Opposition, and confessed that his speech admitted of no reply.†

The usual supporters of Ministers, indeed, said nothing. They left the whole labour of the debate on their side to the placemen. But at two o'clock on the Wednesday morning, when the House came to a division, it almost seemed that this Ministry might yet hold its ground; for the Opposition, notwithstanding the determination of their leaders and the ardour of their followers, only counted one hundred and twenty-nine, and the Ministers numbered two hundred and eighteen. Even after the surrender of Cornwallis, Lord North had yet a majority of about ninety.

Far however from being disheartened, the Opposition renewed the contest on the same afternoon. Lord North had expressed himself very dubiously about continuing the war on the American continent. Lord George Germaine had, however, been more positive; and declared himself most emphatically against any idea of conceding the independence of the Colonies. The two Secretaries of

* *Collected Speeches*, vol. ii. p. 288.

† *Wraxall's Hist. Mem.*, vol. ii. p. 445.

State in the other House, Lords Hillsborough and Stormont, had also used language utterly at variance with the apparent hesitation of the Prime Minister. A breach was opening, through which the enemies of the Government saw the prospect, at no distant period, of leading their columns to victory.

On the report of the Address being brought up, their attacks were therefore even more impassioned and vigorous than on the previous day. Young William Pitt made a most able speech, which produced the loudest burst of approbation; and in the loftiest tones he called on the Ministers to state explicitly what were their intentions respecting the prosecution of the war. When he sat down, there was a general pause. Every one looked at the Treasury Bench, and appeared to demand an answer. The bold, unscrupulous, and versatile Henry Dundas presented himself to the House. He denied that the Address in any respect pledged the Commons to continue the war; but his speech was supposed to admit the fact of that dissension which the Opposition suspected to exist in the Cabinet between Lord North and Lord George Germaine. Burke argued, in answer to the Lord Advocate, that from what had been expressed in the Lords, there was a want of concert in the Government, and strongly accused Lord North of cheating the House. He then alluded to the tenth article of Cornwallis's capitulation, by which the Royalists in the southern provinces were, without stipulation, abandoned to the mercy of their hostile countrymen; and he declared himself to be shocked and horrified beyond measure at the doom which hung over these faithful adherents of the British Crown. Their quartered remains, he said, might be even then hanging on every headland. Giving way to the vehe-

ment susceptibility of his nature, he painted these anticipated cruelties with so much passionate power, that he wrought up the feeling of his audience to the highest pitch of excitement ; and he was so much affected by his own description, that he trembled violently, and his whole frame for some moments shook from the intensity of his emotions.

The scene was most painful. Some of the Ministerialists spoke of this display of feeling as morbid. It was, however, the unimpeachable evidence of a sincerity far beyond the estimate of the mere political partisan. Nor was the apprehension Burke entertained at all unwarrantable. The worst feature of the war was, the deadly hatred which the Royalists and the Republicans felt against each other. Only in the spring of the year, a body of four hundred mounted Tories, on their way to join the British ranks, had been fallen in with, near Hillsborough, by a superior force of their countrymen, and, notwithstanding their cries for mercy, were ruthlessly sabred. The men, too, at whose probable fate Burke was so agitated, were not even persons for whom he had any political sympathies. After recovering from his excitement, he, with his philanthropic impartiality, alluded to the case of Colonel H. Laurens, and mentioned the fact, that while Lord Cornwallis was Constable of the Tower, and therefore had officially the charge of this prisoner of State, the English General had himself become the prisoner of the ex-President's son ; for he, by a curious coincidence, had been appointed Captain-General of prisoners in America, and employed by Washington, on the part of his countrymen, to draw up the articles of Lord Cornwallis's surrender.*

* *Collected Speeches*, vol. ii. p. 294.

Burke was utterly unacquainted with Laurens until Franklin's letter called his attention to the circumstances of the confinement in the Tower. As soon as he learnt that the prisoner, then a man of an advanced age, and esteemed by all who knew him for the independence and generosity of his character, was suffering the rigours of a close imprisonment, prevented from carrying on a proper correspondence with his friends and family, and even denied the use of pens and ink, all his sympathies were awakened. The old man appearing to him a venerable martyr in the cause of his country, he determined to leave nothing undone to oblige the Government to mitigate the hardships of his confinement, and to procure his release. The disaster of Yorktown and the meeting of Parliament gave him, what he had not before, a favourable opportunity to press the negotiation which Franklin had committed to his hands. On meeting with some rebuffs from the Ministers for his interference in the business, he immediately gave notice, that on the third of December he would call the attention of the House to the case of Colonel Laurens.

When the private business on that day had been despatched, Burke was called upon by the Speaker to bring forward his motion. He was, however, not in his place, and nowhere to be found. He received a most unusual testimony of respect. On Fox stating that he knew his honourable friend fully intended to bring in the subject of which he had given notice, and that he had sent his servant to ascertain the cause of Burke's absence, the Commons agreed to wait until the footman returned. Before, however, a minute had expired, Burke rushed in, breathing very hard. He had evidently been running very fast. After a pause to recover himself, he said, that

he felt extremely confused, not from any sense of delinquency, but from the excessive indulgence of the House. As the subject he had determined to bring forward deeply concerned the national justice, he had taken every pains to procure correct information. Some days previously, he had written to the Treasury, asking whether the Government had any objections to have the Governor of the Tower examined at the bar. The reply, which he had only received at half-past two that afternoon, told him, what he knew very well before, that Ministers would have no objection to the examination of the Lieutenant, if they saw proper reasons for this officer's appearance. Not knowing what method to adopt, he had rushed off to consult a friend, and been thus unavoidably absent. He knew not as yet what course to take, and begged to postpone the business for a few days. The House therefore adjourned.*

The next day, Burke brought forward, on similar motives of humanity, another question, of which he had also given notice. Others might make the mere party motions. To him, by common consent, was already abandoned the hazardous office of accusing great offenders. He had pledged himself on the former occasion to renew the subject of the confiscation of private property in St. Eustatius. He now redeemed this pledge. A valuable part of this plunder had been taken by the French as it was being conveyed to England. By them also the island had been recaptured. Rodney had returned home from the West Indies in bad health, at the time when Sir Samuel Hood sailed to the Chesapeake, and the Admiral on this evening was in his place as a Member of the House of Commons. General Vaughan, the officer who had

* *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xxii. p. 766.

commanded the military portion of the expedition, was also present. Burke went over all the grounds of his former condemnation. He even displayed a piece of linen rag which had been ripped from the lining of a Jew's coat, as he was attempting to conceal, in the loss of his property, money to procure him the merest necessaries of life. Both Rodney and Vaughan denied the facts of Burke's accusations. But the Ministers, on the pretence that such an investigation would interfere with the jurisdictions of the ordinary courts of law, in which many actions against the British commanders for their conduct at St. Eustatius had already been entered, still pertinaciously refused a committee of inquiry. In the division, Pitt was one of the tellers against the Government. The individual case of the Jew whose clothes had been cut open, and who was named Hoheb, Burke introduced at a later period of the session; and in this instance succeeded in obtaining a committee, which reported in the Jew's favour. No general inquiry was ever undertaken. The subsequent judgments of the different courts of law however fully justified Burke. All Rodney's later life was harassed, and he was nearly ruined by the lawsuits in which he had involved himself through his harsh and illegal proceedings at St. Eustatius.*

But the task of an accuser was, as Burke acknowledged, no enviable one. Both in this business and in the case of Mr. Laurens, he received the most pointed contradictions. Obloquy, insult, and defiance met him at every step. Yet, through such difficulties, with the determination of his nature, he nobly persevered.

All the obstructive machinery of the Treasury was

* Burke's Collected Speeches, vol. ii. pp. 313 and 325. Wraxall's Hist. Mem., vol. ii. p. 401.

employed to frustrate his endeavours with respect to the American statesman. First he heard from one Secretary, then from the other. He was assured that Burgoyne had already been exchanged. His representations of the hardships Mr. Laurens was suffering in the Tower were denied. In answer to the announcement of his intention to lay the whole subject before the House of Commons, he was told that Lord Hillsborough, the Secretary of State, was utterly indifferent as to what course he might take. He was dared to do his worst. He had acted, it was sneeringly insinuated, with his usual precipitation. He had made charges which he had not the courage to retract, but which he knew it was impossible to substantiate.

Being thus challenged, he could not allow the Christmas holidays to arrive without doing something. He therefore gave notice, on the seventeenth of December, that immediately after the recess he would bring in a Bill to regulate the exchange of prisoners of war, and particularly direct the application of it to the cases of Mr. Laurens and General Burgoyne. Entering at the same time into a general statement of the hardships which the late President of Congress had undergone, and omitting all the complimentary parts of Dr. Franklin's letter to himself, he read the passages which showed how his attention had been called to the matter, and, however much it might appear surrounded by technical difficulties, how easy the implied exchange of Burgoyne for Laurens might be effected. He concluded with a motion for papers.

Then General Burgoyne thanked Burke for having striven to procure his release, and for the high terms in which he had spoken of his character. Lord Newhaven,

on the authority of the Lieutenant of the Tower, questioned the authenticity of Burke's facts, and hinted that the orator himself deserved to be sent to this State prison for entering into a correspondence with Dr. Franklin. "Good God!" exclaimed the noble Lord, "can I believe my ears? Do not my senses deceive me? Can a member of this assembly not only avow his correspondence with a rebel, but dare to read it to us? But not only has he done this, but he has actually gone to the Ministers, avowing what he had done, and even showing them the evidence of his treason." Another county Member at once offered to move a vote of censure. Being out of order, he was stopped by the Speaker. Lord North and Lord George Germaine, though they both spoke in the course of the debate, said nothing on the delicate question Lord Newhaven had raised. Burke, in reply, treated the accusations of high treason with scorn and contempt. "I am not rich enough," he said, "to occupy apartments in the Tower. Such a prison is better adapted to the rank and fortune of the noble Lord. But if I were confined in the Tower, and could there enjoy the society of such men as Mr. Laurens and Dr. Franklin, I may perhaps be permitted to say, that I should not in any degree regret the loss of the noble Lord's company."*

He appeared to think that the attack scarcely deserved an answer. Yet his intercourse with Dr. Franklin during the American war has, in certain quarters, been made a standing reproach. One contemporary writer, who was then a Member of Parliament, and present during the debate of that evening, has compared Burke's conduct to that of Hastings in extirpating the Rohillas,

* Parl. Hist., vol. xxii. p. 865.

and to that of Lord Melville in employing for his private use the public money of his office. "But Hastings and Lord Melville," says this author, "were both sent to take their trial at the bar of the Peers, while Burke escaped all prosecution."* This may be taken as a fair example of the manner in which some minds reason from analogy on political affairs, and arrive at the most absurd conclusions. Burke might perhaps be excused for thinking that, whatever might be the circumstances of the moment, he was justified in making a private request to an old friend like Dr. Franklin. His only motive was that of setting free another friend. There was no selfish interest in the application. It could neither make him richer nor greater. Humanity has no confining frontiers, no separating seas. Neither between governments nor nations can there be any dissensions so deadly and inveterate as to prevent philosophers and philanthropists from having the slightest intercourse with each other. Franklin had become a citizen of America, while Burke remained the subject of King George ; yet they were also both members of the great republic of letters, which knows nothing of political differences, unnatural contentions, and bloody wars.

Burke was himself neither abashed nor intimidated by his imputed guilt of misprision of treason. Just before the adjournment of the House for the Christmas recess, he again provoked a discussion of the subject. It having been said that even Mr. Laurens himself did not complain of ill-treatment, his unwearied advocate triumphantly disposed of this allegation by presenting a petition from the prisoner, written with a black-lead pencil for want of pens and ink, complaining of every circum-

* Wraxall's Hist. Mem., vol. ii. p. 276.

stance which had been brought forward, and praying for a release from that close confinement under which he was seriously languishing. The petition was allowed to lie on the table.*

At the adjournment of the House for the holidays, Burke had however no hopes that the prayer of the petitioner would be granted. Waiting to see the result of his endeavours, he had not yet answered Franklin's letter of the last October. He now wrote to the philosopher, relating the obstacles which had interfered with the proposed exchange. Being evidently fearful lest, as this offer seemed to have been positively refused by the English Ministers, the Congress would renew in the most peremptory manner their demand for the return of General Burgoyne, Burke earnestly besought Franklin's good offices to prevent such a resolution. "I could wish," he wrote, "that this Government would take the lead in every act of generosity. But Providence has not done its work by halves. Things are disposed of otherwise; and along with the gifts of fortune you have what fortune alone cannot give. I wished to grant, and I am left to supplicate."†

His supplications were happily needless. His energetic representations in the House of Commons were slowly producing the result he desired to obtain. Mr. Laurens was in these Christmas weeks released from his close confinement, and admitted to bail. Shortly afterwards, Burgoyne was exchanged. The Bill of which Burke had given notice, and which he was then framing, had accomplished its object even without having been introduced.

* See this petition in Burke's *Collected Speeches*, vol. ii. p. 312.

† *Correspondence*, vol. ii. p. 451.

It was prudent in the Government to give way. So powerful had the Opposition become, and so evidently was the Ministry sinking under their renewed attacks, that it might well be doubted whether all the influence of Lord North could have defeated so reasonable a measure. At Christmas the breach had perceptibly widened; and it became evident that the Cabinet, as then constituted, could no longer successfully continue to resist the force of its assailants. Whatever that change might be, a change of some kind was inevitable.

As Lord George Germaine had declared that he never would consent to the independence of the Colonies, and the failure of Cornwallis had been particularly ascribed to this American Secretary, for a time the whole thunder of the Opposition broke over his devoted head. The dissension which had been intimated as existing between himself and Lord North encouraged these particular attacks that the Prime Minister himself appeared far from anxious to avert. A resolution had been proposed by Sir J. Lowther, the not very reputable Member for Cumberland, declaring that all further attempts to reduce the Americans to submission by force, would be ineffectual and contrary to the best interests of this kingdom. It was vigorously supported by the Opposition. Both Fox and Burke forcibly painted the delusion of continuing the contest. The current of feeling was now running so strongly with the Opposition, that to meet a resolution so strongly directed against their policy, the Ministers had only ventured to move the order of the day. They only carried this previous question by forty-one.

Two days afterwards, when the army estimates were laid upon the table, the subject was again renewed.

Rigby and Dundas opened their masked battery against the Secretary of State; and, in avowing that they would not support the Government if the war was still to be continued on the American continent, were believed to be acting in concert with Lord North, and endeavouring to hasten Lord George Germaine's resignation. The Prime Minister's own conduct did not discountenance this supposition. Quitting his usual seat on the Treasury bench, he removed to a back row, and left Lord Germaine alone, to bear the whole brunt of the assault. Though the Government was successful on the division, the Secretary of War thought, not without reason, as he sipped his claret at night, that it was quite time to make an offer of retiring. He placed his resignation in the hands of Lord North, and went down to his seat at Drayton, in Northamptonshire, expecting or at least professing to expect, that on his return to town, after the Christmas holidays, his successor would be appointed.*

Intelligence however arrived which, for the moment, called off the opponents of the Ministry from their incessant attacks against the American Secretary, and concentrated all their wrath once more on Lord Sandwich, who, notwithstanding the hostility of nearly all the most distinguished members of the naval profession, still remained First Lord of the Admiralty.

A French squadron was in Brest harbour, ready to sail for the West Indies. Rodney, with another armament, was also preparing to return to a similar destination; but as his ships were not quite ready, Admiral Kempenfelt, a great favourite of the Ministry, was sent with another naval force to intercept the French expedition. It was of course easy to discover the number of

* Wraxall's Hist. Mem., vol. ii. p. 476.

the enemy's sail. As the Channel fleet was at home, and other vessels were fitting out at Portsmouth, there could also be as little difficulty in sending an equal or even superior equipment. It seemed that one easy victory was at least before the Administration ; and when it was reported that Kempenfelt had fallen in with his antagonist, there was a general rejoicing among all the adherents of the Government. Yet this enterprise had the same result as nearly all that this Ministry undertook. The British Admiral found, on bearing down upon the French fleet, that it amounted to at least nineteen ships of the line, while he had only twelve under his command ; and though he succeeded in capturing a few transports, he was obliged to retreat homeward without accomplishing the object for which he was sent out.

This appeared to fill up the measure of Lord Sandwich's failures. It was first known three days before Parliament was about to adjourn for the holidays ; and the Ministerial proposal of not meeting again for business until the twenty-second of January was received with much indignation. Fox fiercely assailed the First Lord of the Admiralty, to whom he did not hesitate to impute treachery, and into whose conduct, as soon as the House re-assembled, he announced his intention of proposing the most rigorous inquiry. George Byng moved for a call of the House on the thirty-first of the following month. Lord North found himself obliged to agree to a compromise. The time for the meeting of Parliament again, was fixed for the twenty-first of January, and the call of the House was carried for the same day.

The lists stood thus marshalled at the beginning of the year 1782. In proportion to the evident weakness of

the Ministry was the confident anticipation of the Opposition. The battle must be fairly fought out.

Fox redeemed his promise. The inquiry into Lord Sandwich's conduct was the first business in which he engaged the House of Commons after the Christmas recess. His motion for a committee was introduced by a speech of great eloquence and logical power. Not one of Lord Sandwich's blunders throughout the course of five years was omitted from the comprehensive survey of his naval administration, in a long harangue delivered with passionate vituperation and full of Demosthenic fire. Lord Mulgrave, one of the Commissioners of the Admiralty, officially defended Lord Sandwich. He was the Honourable Constantine Phipps of the days of Wilkes's persecution and Mansfield's charges to the juries; but years had passed since he had become a courtier and sat at the Board of Admiralty as a naval officer remarkable for having formerly been on a voyage of discovery towards the North Pole. The wits at Brooks's nicknamed him *Ursa Major*, from the contrast between his huge rolling figure, and the diminutive proportions of his brother Charles; and they also christened him *Alphesibœus*, from the supposed resemblance between him and the clumsy imitator of the dancing satyrs, in Virgil's *Bucolics*.* Fox's powerful reasoning, however, swept away all Lord Mulgrave's solemn apologies. The torrent was irresistible. Lord North could do nothing but agree to the committee, and grant paper after paper of the most delicate nature, without the pretence of a debate or the formality of a division.

But while thus eagerly leading the war of the Opposition, Fox fell ill. The Ministers began to hope that the

* “Saltantes Satyros imitabitur Alphesibœus.”—Ecl. v. 73.

committee would be abandoned. Leaving this business entirely to his friend, Burke had scarcely interfered in these particular discussions ; but during Fox's indisposition, he stepped forward on the twenty-eighth of January, and declared that under any circumstances the inquiry must proceed. "Even," said he, "were the country to suffer such a serious calamity as the death of my honourable friend, the investigation ought still to be followed up earnestly and solemnly. Nay, of so much consequence is this inquiry to the public, that should such be his fate, no bad use would be made of the skin of my departed friend, if, like that of John of Zisca, it were converted into a drum, and used for the purpose of sounding an alarm to the people of England."* This illustration of John of Zisca's skin, Burke, as none who have read his works can ever forget, afterwards, in a splendid passage, applied to himself and his efforts to animate Europe against revolutionary France.†

On the same evening he entered warmly into another subject, which arose about a contract for saltpetre, in the consideration of the Ordnance estimates. Being renewed on several different occasions, it was attended with circumstances almost as mortifying to Lord North as Fox's Committee of Inquiry into the state of the Navy continued to be, and undoubtedly contributed to weaken the supremacy which the Court had hitherto so long maintained in the House of Commons. On one occasion, Burke proposed to question Lord North on the papers. The Minister was obliged to acknowledge that he had not looked into them, and found himself overwhelmed by the humour of his matchless antagonist.‡ A declining

* Parl. Hist., vol. xxii. p. 904.

† Letter to a Noble Lord.

‡ Parl. Hist., vol. xxii. p. 947.

Government is frequently first beaten on mere administrative details. Burke moved a censorial resolution, which Lord North would have gladly met even with the order of the day ; and the report of the Ordnance estimates was, on the fourth of February, only received after a fifth debate on the subject, and a very close division.*

Then Fox, with renewed health and spirits, occupied the field. On the seventh, the House again went into committee. Three hours were employed by the clerk in reading the papers. Considering then that the case was sufficiently substantiated, Fox delivered a speech of great power, recapitulating all the blunders of the Board of Admiralty, and particularly the more recent shortcomings which had operated so prejudicially during the last campaign. The allowing De Grasse to sail without interruption to the West Indies ; the loss of the convoy from St. Eustatius ; a letter from the Admiralty to the Mayor of Bristol, denying that the combined fleets were in the Channel at the time when they were meditating an attack on Admiral Darby in Torbay ; the want of system in carrying on the Dutch war ; and the neglect in sending out Admiral Kempenfelt with an insufficient force, formed five distinct heads of accusation, which were brought to an intelligible issue in a resolution declaring that during the preceding year there had been gross mismanagement in the conduct of his Majesty's naval affairs. Lord Mulgrave again defended Lord Sandwich ; but his arguments were principally apologies. Lord North, too, was more than ordinarily earnest, for he felt that in his colleague's fall his own was involved. Admirals Howe and Pigot, both naval authorities far superior to North and Mulgrave, warmly

* Annual Register, 1782, p. 155.

supported Fox's resolution. It was only negatived by a majority of twenty-two.

This defeat of the Opposition could scarcely be construed into a victory of the Ministry. Fox was not dissatisfied with the result. Professing to regret that, according to form, his resolution could not be recorded on the Journals, he announced that the question should be again discussed. Later in the same month the battle was fought once more on the same ground. Pitt seconded Fox, and, laying his hand upon his heart, declared in his grave and serious manner, that the whole of the proposition had been fully, clearly, and expressly proved. Some respectable country gentlemen, thinking that the Opposition were going to extremes, refused to support a resolution in which however they agreed. The House was more crowded than even in the preceding debate; and the numbers on both sides were greater in the division. The Ministers were evidently sinking under these pertinacious attacks. Their majority had diminished to nineteen, and two hundred and seventeen Members voted with the Opposition. Looking at the array of placemen then in the House, and who, amounting to nearly a hundred, obeyed implicitly the commands of the Court, it was not without reason that this expression of opinion was regarded by Fox and Burke as equivalent to a decided vote of censure from all the independent part of the nation on Lord Sandwich and his reckless administration of naval affairs. They determined immediately to follow up the blow, by striking directly at the American war and at Lord North. Circumstances had just occurred which would render such a stroke more opportune than it had ever yet been.

In the middle of this month of February, Lord George Germaine at length retired. Wishing to show how much was still to be gained by complying with the Royal wishes, whatever effect this conduct might have on the country, the King had, of his own accord, conferred a peerage on this nobleman loaded with the hatred of the people and the disasters of the war, and raised him to the Upper House, under the title of Viscount Sackville. This step provoked much indignation among some of the Lords, who asserted it to be derogatory to their body to admit a man labouring under the sentence of a court-martial declaring him incapable of serving the Sovereign in any military capacity. It was however immediately succeeded by a still greater imprudence, at which contempt outstripped indignation. In this great political crisis at home, and with almost the whole world leagued against the nation abroad, the individual chosen to succeed Lord George Germaine as War Minister, and to direct with the arms of Hercules the thunders of the State, was the veteran sinecurist, Welbore Ellis.

He was seventy years of age. He had long been Treasurer of the Navy, and, satisfied with a place which for its emoluments was only surpassed by that of the Pay Office, had steadily supported all the miserable system of the Court that was nearly destroying the noblest empire on which the sun ever shone. Junius had formerly called him Mannikin and Grildrig ; and the insignificance of his person was not forgotten in the proportions of his intellect. Even in those days of form and routine, he was the most rigid and narrow of formalists. He spoke without animation, without eloquence, without taste ; everything about him was precise, solemn, and severe. Always appearing in his place dressed in every

respect as though he were just going to the drawing-room at St. James's, he sat on the Treasury bench as the Nestor of the House of Commons, in a court suit.*

That this man should have been chosen to fill such an appointment, demonstrates to an absurdity the madness and criminality of the course the King and his Ministers had so long pursued. Never before that time had such an array of political ability been seen together as was then within the walls of the popular assembly. Never since that time has that vast phalanx of every talent for oratory and statesmanship been equalled. Yet, among all those eloquent tongues, vigorous intellects, and ambitious hearts, no successor to Lord George Germaine could be found. But the task from which every great statesman shrunk with alarm, a Welbore Ellis presumed and was permitted to undertake.

The grey-headed formalist soon learnt, however, that he would not be permitted to occupy in peace the elevated post into which he had boldly ventured. Justly alarmed lest the war should be carried on in the same manner as while Lord George Germaine was Minister, the Opposition determined to take the earliest opportunity of moving that an Address should be presented to the 'Throne against continuing the contest in America. Two days after the last debate on the Navy, this resolution was proposed by General Conway. He was admirably qualified to give it weight, for he was one of those respectable individuals whose virtues are universally admitted, without any one being able to say in what they particularly consist, or how the praise which is on every lip came to be fairly deserved. The General had long ago recanted the errors into which he had

* See Wraxall's Hist. Mem., vol. ii. p. 220.

been led. His desertion of Lord Rockingham, his being a member of the Government which introduced the tea duty, and his acrimonious attacks on the great man who had long borne in Opposition the labour and the heat of the day, were forgotten ; and at this eleventh hour Conway came forward, as at the repeal of the Stamp Act, to win golden opinions by having his name associated with triumphs for which others had laboriously struggled from the dawn, and prepared the way with their dearest heart's blood.

Lord John Cavendish seconded Conway's motion. Then, amid the deep silence of the House, rose, for the first time since his appointment, the new American Secretary. He spoke in the old tone of confidence ; still boasted of the friends the Royal cause had in the revolted provinces ; and argued that it was necessary to carry on the war, at least against France, in America. This old man, who was so young a War Minister, spoke amid chilling silence on all sides. Exultation sat on the brows of the Opposition. A heavy sense of depression saddened the Ministerial benches. The mean figure of the new Minister looked even meaner, as he concluded with some apologetic words. "I have come into office," said he, "to employ the remains of vigour left me by age and infirmity, for the benefit of the State. I have now made my confession of faith, and trust it may prove satisfactory to the House."

Burke immediately stood up, and by a few opening sentences overwhelmed Ellis with sarcastic ridicule. "A confession of faith," he declared, "more obscure, more absurd, more incomprehensible, was never framed or delivered for the delusion and calamity of mankind. Like confessions of faith of the same unintelligible de-

scription, it can only be supported by miracles. For what satisfaction has this young Secretary given to the House? Not one word have we been able to extract from him which the last American Minister has not told us five years ago." Burke fixed his eyes steadily on Ellis, and accused him of being Lord George Germaine in effigy. He compared the diminutive Minister to a caterpillar that, having long reposed in the chrysalis state within the silken folds of the Treasurership of the Navy, had at length burst its ligaments, expanded its wings, and fluttered forth the Secretary of the hour. Though the appearance of the creature might be changed, it was however a caterpillar still. Ellis seemed crushed under the profusion of the orator's tropes and metaphors, conveying the keenest irony and the most insulting ridicule. The exposure was humiliating to the Ministers. This speech was considered to have had no inconsiderable influence on the fortune of the struggle.*

Jenkinson, the lank and ungraceful Secretary at War, still speaking with oracular mystery as the supposed confidential agent of the King, and the sinister expression of whose face resembled a dark lantern,† attempted to come to the rescue. But the work was far beyond the ability of his cautious and meagre oratory. He suffered almost as much in reply from Fox as Ellis had undergone from Burke. Pitt, grave, dignified, and impressive, powerfully supported the two great leaders of the Opposition. Lord North exerted all his powers. But he seemed fairly borne down. The division was at last taken; and, in a crowded House, the Government was found to have only a majority of one.

* Parl. Hist., vol. xxii. p. 1035.

† Wraxall's Hist. Mem., vol. ii. p. 209.

Instead of resigning the next day, Lord North appeared preparing for his Budget. The Court evidently hoped that, by steady and patient resistance, it might yet ride out the storm. Feeling confident that they would be supported by some Members who were absent from the last division, the Opposition determined to lose no time in renewing the motion. On the twenty-seventh of February, five days after the former debate, Conway proposed a similar resolution in a speech full of that fluent eloquence which, when he was strongly excited, and conscious of acting a popular part, came readily from his tongue. Lord North, feeling that the decisive moment was come, and desirous of preserving his credit for sincerity at St. James's, spoke against the proposition with more apparent earnestness and emotion than he had ever previously displayed. Wallace, the Solicitor-General, moved that the debate should be adjourned for a fortnight, in order that Ministers might bring in a Bill empowering them to treat for a truce with America, rather than for an immediate peace. This was of course a poor expedient to stave off what could not be directly opposed. The new Secretary of State did not rise. It was remarked that he appeared not yet to have recovered from the severe castigation inflicted upon him by Burke in the previous discussion.* For Ellis, Burke evidently watched, as the hawk its quarry, throughout the debate, and, finding that his recent adversary did not break silence, he also did not speak on the question. Pitt, Fox, Sheridan, and Dunning, with very different but most effective weapons, vigorously sustained the common cause of the Opposition. About fourteen Members had paired off when, at half past one in the

* Wraxall, vol. ii. p. 531.

morning, the House became impatient, and loud cries of Question ! Question ! greeted every new speaker. Then came the division, not on the question, but on a motion for adjournment. The numbers were two hundred and fifteen for the Ministers, two hundred and thirty-four for the Opposition. Government had been beaten by a majority of nineteen. As soon as the result was announced, loud and prolonged cheering, which threatened to bring the roof down, and echoed throughout Westminster Hall, burst forth from the victorious Opposition. The original motion, and an Address to the King, in pursuance of the resolution, were separately proposed and carried with shouts of acclamation.

The joy throughout the Metropolis, as the news spread abroad, was greater than that with which any victory over the foreign enemies or the Colonists had been received. It was justly felt that the direst enemies England then had, were in the Government offices, at the Council Board, and at St. James's, and that from those enemies there was at last a prospect of deliverance. Even what is seldom seen at a crisis in an established Ministry, actually occurred : the funds, after a long course of depression, began immediately to rise.*

It was past two o'clock in the morning before Burke left the House of Commons after this great victory. Of what immense importance he considered it, though he had not himself spoken in the course of the debate, is proved by a letter which he wrote to Franklin on the same day. Apologizing for his delay in answering a letter he had received from the American philosopher, in reply to his appeal of the last December, " Providence," said Burke, " has well supplied my deficiencies ; I con-

* See Fox's Collected Speeches, vol. ii. p. 36.

gratulate you as the friend of America,—I trust, as not the enemy of England,—I am sure, as the friend of mankind,—on the resolution of the House of Commons carried by a majority of nineteen, at two o'clock this morning, in a very full House. It was the declaration of two hundred and thirty-four; I think it was the opinion of the whole. I trust it will lead to a speedy peace between the two branches of the English nation, perhaps to a general peace; and that our happiness may be an introduction to that of the world at large.” One motive with him for continuing his correspondence with Franklin, may have been the hope that, in the probable event of a change of Ministry, this means of communication might be rendered advantageous in bringing about that peace between England and America for which he so earnestly longed.

This change of Ministry soon, however, appeared far from being the inevitable consequence of the condemnation of the war. The Address was presented at the foot of the Throne by the whole House. His Majesty’s speech in reply was most vague and unsatisfactory. During the ceremony, there stood at the King’s right-hand, General Arnold, who had certainly been the boldest and most enterprising officer in the American army, and yet, such appears the extraordinary contradiction in his nature, had eternally associated his name with the most flagrant act of military treachery on record. A traitor is generally regarded as a coward. Arnold had, in the most desperate conflicts, shown himself the bravest of the brave. His appearance in the Sovereign’s presence, with evident marks of the highest favour, was considered a most unfavourable indication of the pacific intentions within the Royal breast. General Conway again stood forward as the ex-

ponent of the popular sentiment; and the House declared, without the Ministers having ventured to go to a division, that all who should advise the King to continue offensive operations in North America, would be enemies of their country.

Still there were as yet no signs of Lord North's resignation. His own words, his own acts, had quite an opposite appearance. The next evening, on the introduction of the Solicitor-General's Bill to empower his Majesty to negotiate a truce with the Colonies, the Minister, in answer to Fox's galling taunts and invectives, declared that he would not resign unless a direct vote for his removal, or of want of confidence, was carried. Under all other circumstances, whatever policy he might be compelled to adopt, he assured the House, with his usual humility, that he would continue in office out of gratitude to the people and the Sovereign. News had reached England that Minorca had at last surrendered; and a rumour was also abroad that St. Christopher's, next to Jamaica the most valuable island remaining to England in the West Indies, had also been taken by France. All however seemed to make no impression on the apathetic Minister. He went on with his Budget as though the circumstances were of the most ordinary nature, as though he had sustained no great defeats, and was still supported by an obedient majority.

It might however be easy to conclude a loan. It was not so easy to devise more taxes. The people were labouring under new and extraordinary impositions; and Lord North was almost at the end of his financial resources. Day after day he had been obliged to postpone the statement of his ways and means; and on making a similar request on the sixth of March, Burke started

up with a novel Budget of his own, indicating the losses the country had sustained under the existing Administration. He showed the Commons, that whether they ate or drank, walked or rode, stayed at home or went abroad, whatever they did, or left undone, they were heavily and unusually taxed. No wonder therefore Lord North knew not what other burdens to impose. "Taking," said Burke, "the blessings we owe to the noble Lord in a mercantile form: on one side, we have, Debtor by loss, one hundred millions of money; on the other, Creditor by loss, one hundred thousand men, thirteen American provinces, an annual revenue of four millions five hundred thousand pounds, five West Indian Islands, besides Florida and Minorca." The House was deeply moved by this comprehensive summary of defeat and ruin. Without pausing, he turned round upon Lord North and his announcement of the previous evening, that he would not resign, out of gratitude to his Royal Master and the English people. "The noble Lord's gratitude!" exclaimed the orator. "Oh! Mr. Speaker, it resembles that of another fallen angel like himself,

"The debt immense of endless gratitude,
So burthensome, still paying, still to owe."* *

Fox was not less severe. No reply came from the Treasury Bench; and the Ministers appeared dumbfounded.

As, however, no direct vote of censure had yet been carried, Lord North considered that he was not imperatively called upon to resign.

But a vote of censure the Opposition at last determined to propose. Two days after Burke's humiliating exposure of the misfortunes the country had suffered at the hands

* See Wraxall, vol. ii. p. 556.

of the Government, several resolutions in accordance with what he had expressed were moved by Lord John Cavendish, and they were finally clenched by an express declaration, that such a series of disasters could only have arisen from a want of ability and foresight in his Majesty's Ministers. Instead of meeting this vote of censure with a direct negative, as at any other time, and any other Ministers would have considered themselves in honour bound to do, or at once to resign ; the Government again had recourse to the poor and unsatisfactory expedient of the order of the day. Jenkinson, as was his wont, like a man crossing over a torrent on stones, and deliberately taking every step to avoid wetting his shoe,* spoke with mysterious cautiousness ; and endeavoured to show that England was left without allies, and sinking under the attacks of inveterate foes, only because her splendid successes in the last war had exposed her to the envy of her neighbours. Welbore Ellis also, at length, with uneasy glances at Burke, ventured once more into the debate, and intimated that he could not be accused of excessive pliability, because he had given up a lucrative employment to which no responsibility was attached, and had accepted a post of great labour which was not unaccompanied with danger. “I was,” he pathetically observed, “in a warm, comfortable bed, out of which I have been summoned to take an active part in the Ship of State, assailed by storm and tempest.”

Ellis had better have remained silent. Burke, regarding the new Minister as his chosen victim, again swooped like a royal falcon upon his prey. Alluding with keen satire to the facts, that all the men of the

* Wraxall, vol. ii. p. 212.

greatest property declined any longer to support the Administration, and of their defence being left to themselves, the Secretary of State and the Secretary at War, he declared that it was not very decent in men to echo their own praises. "As for the American Secretary," Burke continued, "it is true; as he has told us, that he has quitted a warm bed, and ventured, with his eyes scarcely open, into a vessel leaking, foundering, and tossed on the billows in a violent storm. He has been most unwise to do so. I may appropriately apply to him what Brutus said to Portia :

" 'Wherefore rise you now?
It is not for your health, thus to commit
Your weak condition to the raw cold morning.' "

Burke then declared his belief that Ellis had only left his warm bed, to introduce into the empty place a Scotch warming-pan. At this evident allusion to Dundas, who had been very forward in bringing about Lord George Germaine's resignation, shouts of laughter arose, which the Lord Advocate afterwards turned against Burke, by intimating that, in the changes which seemed immediately impending, the warming-pan might possibly be Irish instead of Scotch. From the Parliamentary point of view, Dundas's retort was happy; but there was no saving Welbore Ellis from again being crushed under Burke's irony and metaphors, which conveyed a truth far beyond the appreciation of a clever Scotch lawyer, all of whose political speculations converged into the point from which his worldly interests could be best advanced. Yet, what all these Ministerial tools were doing every day, Burke, who after so many years of the most arduous political exertion, was scarcely richer than when he began his career, was on this night again accused of doing. Sir

Harry Houghton was one of the orthodox country gentlemen, who, with Sir William Dolben, the Member for the University of Oxford, agreed with the Opposition in condemning the war, but refused on critical emergencies to vote against the Government, and hoped to obtain a peerage from Lord North, by his apparent moderation:—that bastard virtue which in the heat of the struggle, when parties are almost equally balanced, is considered almost worthy of any price, because the possessor of it cunningly knows that in such times it has the power to extort almost any price from a harassed Prime Minister standing desperately at bay. Sir Harry, in the course of the debate, having nothing else to say in answer to Burke's powerful speech, insinuated with gentle malice, that the great orator's opinions might possibly be influenced by the prospect of again, on the restoration of peace, being made agent for New York. Burke rose with great indignation. He remarked that whoever told the honourable Baronet such a story was a liar; and that, so despicable was the meanness of the imputation that, had it not been for the dark colouring of seeming candour with which it was brought forward, it would scarcely have deserved an answer. He had, he said, been a Member of Parliament for seventeen years, and in all that period defied any one to couple his name with one mean, one dirty, one interested transaction.*

Such personal imputations were a poor Ministerial resource. At two o'clock in the morning, the orders of the day were only carried against Lord John Cavendish's resolutions by a majority of ten.

Still they were carried. It was imperatively necessary

* Collected Speeches, vol. ii. pp. 336-341.

for the leaders of Opposition to decide immediately on their next step. There was no time to be lost, for the Easter holidays were very near; and in those days, that vacation was considered the close of the more serious part of the political campaign. The experience of the whole century had proved that, after Easter, a full attendance could not be secured, even on questions of the most momentous importance. If the final blow was to be struck at all, Fox and Burke knew well that it must be struck in the month of March, which was then in its second week. As the fate of the Ministry would therefore probably be decided in the course of the next fortnight, the clubs and drawing-rooms were in a feverish excitement, and anxiety pervaded all ranks and classes, from the Royal household down to the humble politicians in the pothouses. The interest radiated from the Metropolis throughout the kingdom. It was even maintained by an extraordinary invention which, while the great revolutions that were then preparing in Europe remained hidden from human foresight, struck quiet persons with dismay, as resembling what they had read of in the history of the great contest between Charles I. and the Long Parliament. Lists were published and industriously sent over all England, with the names of the Members who voted on each question, printed in red or black letters, according as they supported the popular minority of the Opposition, or the odious majority of the Court.*

Every exertion was made by both sides to recruit their ranks. The waverers were admonished, the timid were encouraged. Invalids were brought down to the House from their beds, travellers were brought from

* Wraxall's Hist. Mem., vol. ii. p. 591.

foreign capitals. Nothing was left undone, in the course of the week after the defeat of Lord John Cavendish's resolutions, to render the next great Parliamentary conflict more decisive.

On the fifteenth of March, Sir John Rous, a Tory and a friend of Lord North, again brought forward similar resolutions. Instead however of censuring the Ministers for want of ability and foresight, they concluded from the same premises with declaring that the House of Commons could have no further confidence in the Government. More Members voted on that night than in the former division. The majority in favour of the Government showed a small but significant diminution. The declaration of want of confidence was only staved off by nine, when no less than four hundred and sixty-seven Members gave their negative or affirmative to the question.

This state of things could not last. Imprudence and obstinacy were introducing into the struggle subjects of a much more serious nature than the continuance or the resignation of any Ministry. The majority, small as it was, being, from the enormous influence of the Court, purely artificial, the expression of public opinion, condemning the war and condemning the Government, had become most unequivocal.

The Opposition, since Christmas, had advanced to the Ministerial citadel with the most scientific approaches. They had first attacked individual Members of the Government. They had virtually fixed an indelible stigma on Lord Sandwich. They had compelled Lord George Germaine to resign. Then, rising to a more lofty aim, they had put an end to the war on the American continent. Following up their successes, they had struck at

Lord North himself, who had just escaped direct and formal censure by a hair's-breadth. Even the last division showed that the tendency of time and events was to increase the strength of the Opposition. Their able leaders had already given notice of another motion to the same purport as their last ; and this it was by no means impossible that they might succeed in carrying. What other steps would then remain for them to take ? Only two, but these very grave ones : an Address to the Throne for the Minister's removal, and an inevitable impeachment. The axe and the block had already frequently appeared in the rhetorical imagery of Fox and Burke. Was it so very certain that such disagreeable allusions might always be merely bold figures of speech ?

No wonder that Lord North at last became in earnest to resign ! Before the debate on Sir John Rous's resolutions, the Chancellor Thurlow had taken Lord Rockingham aside in the House of Lords, and, with the sanction of the King, requested the Marquis to explain his sentiments on a plan for a new Administration on a comprehensive basis. Knowing the persons with whom he had to deal, and suspecting, as in 1767, that these overtures might only be part of a sinister scheme to divide the Opposition, Lord Rockingham firmly refused to enter into any details for forming a Government, unless he had previously the King's explicit consent to the principles on which only he could undertake, at such a terrible moment, to carry it on, and endeavour to save the nation. These stipulations were that peace with the Colonies should be brought about by acknowledging their independence ; that Burke's economical Bills should, as a system of economy, be adopted ; and that the Bills for disqualifying contractors

from being Members of Parliament, and revenue officers from voting at elections, should, with all the weight of the Court and Ministry, be carried through Parliament, and receive the assent of the Sovereign. These seem moderate terms. Lord Rockingham could not require less, without acting contrary to the conscientious determination which in his public conduct he had ever maintained, of performing in office all that he had professed in Opposition. Yet, as they meant the abandonment of that system of influence which George III. had so stubbornly striven to build up, at the expense of all the most valuable interests of his kingdom, they were to him of hard digestion. He had resort to every artifice of equivocation. Thurlow growled and bullied. But Lord Rockingham, who, in all such negotiations, displayed more prudence and resolution than perhaps any other leading politician has ever done, was neither to be duped nor frightened. After the last debate, the proposed arrangement was broken off by the Marquis declaring, in words which ought to be engraven on the heart of every patriotic statesman called, on a great national emergency, to power, by the suffrages of his countrymen, and to counteract the imprudences and intrigues of a selfish Court, that it did not appear to him "advisable, first to attempt to form a Ministry by arrangement of office, afterwards to decide upon what principles or measures they were to act."*

Yet the circumstances admitted of no further delay. Lord Surrey had been put forward by the Opposition to make another motion for the dismissal of the Ministry; and the appointed day, Wednesday, the twentieth of

* Letter to Thurlow, March 16th, 1782. *Memoirs of Lord Rockingham*, vol. ii. p. 459.

March, was fast approaching. As George III. found that Lord Rockingham was steadfastly determined not to accept office until his terms were unreservedly accepted, his Majesty became only the more moody and obstinate. His royal yacht was fitting out at Deptford. Muttered threats of retiring to Hanover were heard coming from his lips. He wrote to Lord North that, rather than throw himself into the hands of the Opposition, he would know how to act according to the dictates of his conscience and honour in the only way that remained open. But these mysterious intimations appear to have had an effect exactly opposite to what the Sovereign intended. They awakened Lord North to a sense of his dangerous position. It was easier for the King, under such circumstances, to retire to Hanover than to return again to England. A Minister conniving at the step must be left unsheltered from the retributive vengeance of that Parliament to which he, at least, was constitutionally responsible. Being at last thoroughly alarmed, Lord North pressed his resignation with more urgency than his Majesty deemed respectful. It was not until the afternoon on which Lord Surrey's motion was to come on, that George III. gave his reluctant consent to that which all his most disinterested and wisest subjects had long agreed in considering absolutely necessary, in order to preserve what yet remained of the British Empire.*

The House had already met when the Minister gladly hastened to act at once on the permission wrung at last from a Sovereign he had served not wisely but too well. Before four o'clock more than four hundred Members had assembled. All was expectation. The Opposition

* See Memorials and Correspondence of Fox, vol. i. pp. 287, 288.

were eager for the debate, which they confidently expected would terminate in the defeat of the Government. Lord North entered, in his court suit, and with his blue ribbon on his breast. As soon as he reached his place he rose to speak; but his voice was drowned in shouts of Question! Lord Surrey! Motion! and Order! Great confusion ensued. The Ministerialists called on Lord North to speak; the Opposition insisted on proceeding with the motion. Fox, thinking to obviate every difficulty and hinder the Minister from addressing the House, moved that Lord Surrey should be heard. With even greater readiness, Lord North immediately stood up again, saying, "I rise, Mr. Speaker, to speak to that motion." The point of order could not be disputed. Lord North had, by Fox's own manœuvre, obtained possession of the House. Amid deep silence from all sides, the Minister stated that he only wished to speak because he had some information to communicate which would render Lord Surrey's motion unnecessary. Assuming that the Resolution was to effect the removal of the Ministers, Lord North declared that this object had been obtained. He however conveyed the announcement of the fact in very singular phraseology. "The present Administration," said Lord North, "is no more."

He then thanked the House for the support he had long received, and declared that, while a more able successor might easily be found, none could exceed him in zeal for the interests of the country, loyalty to the Sovereign, and devotion to the Constitution. This was the tenour of the Minister's concluding remarks, at the close of an Administration which had been one long succession of shameful disasters.

His followers professed to sympathize with him in

his fall. From his opponents, however, he met with but little consideration. Lord John Cavendish, William Baker, Fox, and Pitt, all spoke strongly, denouncing the wretched Government which was then expiring; and both in manner and language they hopefully and joyfully hailed the approach of a better time.

At length Burke rose. Instead of reflecting the gladness of his friends, his face seemed more than usually grave. It was not, he said, a moment for levity or exultation, but of placid joy and serene satisfaction. It was also a moment of great awfulness. He confessed that he looked forward with fear and trembling. This was the peculiar period in men's lives when their ambitions came forth from the most secret recesses of their hearts, when their prejudices operated most forcibly, when all their worst passions, pride, vanity, avarice, and lust of power, were set at large and prominently displayed. After making some observations on the execrable system which had at length fallen, he proceeded to warn the independent Members on whom the new Government must depend. Their support, he told them, must be strenuous and unremitting, or no good could be permanently effected. The men who were then going out were not tired of their places, neither was their Sovereign tired of them: if Government could not rely on virtue, it must resort to corruption. It was from the House of Commons alone, and not from any individual Minister, that a good Administration could proceed. He declared that he felt very earnest in impressing Honourable Members with this truth, and concluded with warning them to moderate their joy. "Do not," said Burke, "feast your minds with the idea that all is finished, because it is begun. It is a moment for the most serious temper,

because there is a necessity for the most serious action.”*

As soon as he had resumed his seat, General Conway, the living image of candid respectability, presented himself to a somewhat impatient audience. For Burke he professed greater respect than for any other man. But he solemnly hoped that Burke had not said that if the new Government could not find support in virtue it would have recourse to corruption. Such a declaration had given him more anxiety, because the orator would himself most likely be one of the Ministers to whom the country looked up for salvation. It is amusing to find Conway at this moment of their common triumph, gravely admonishing Burke as in the days of the General’s alienation from the Rockingham party.

Burke assured the gallant officer that he had mistaken the purport of his observations. He had only wished to warn the independent Members against inattention; and to remind them that if a system of corruption was again resorted to, through their indifference or relaxness, they would be more to blame than the Ministers by whom it should be introduced. He then alluded to Conway’s remarks on the probability of his being a Minister; and it may be observed that the term, Minister, was in those days generally applied to those who formed the Cabinet only, and not to the subordinate officials of administration. Burke’s remarks are also in other respects most curious. They show how humbly he regarded his own worldly position, and how much more indispensable qualifications, rank, wealth, and high connections were then universally admitted to be for the high offices of the State, than the most splendid talents, the most spotless

* *Collected Speeches*, vol. ii. p. 342.

character, the most boundless knowledge, and the longest and most disinterested public services. “ My right honourable friend,” said Burke, “ is infinitely more likely to become a Minister than I am. I am neither a man who has pretensions to it from rank in the country, nor from fortune, nor who aspires to it from ambition. I am not a man so foolishly vain, nor so blindly ignorant of my own state and condition, as to indulge for a moment the idea of my becoming a Minister.”*

Other Members then attempted to address the House. But the victorious Opposition were clamorously eager to carry the news of their success throughout the anxious Metropolis. At eleven o’clock the House adjourned until the following Monday, with a distinct declaration from Lord Surrey that unless by that time all the Ministers were removed, his motion would be renewed.

The night was bitterly cold. Heavy flakes of snow were falling, and the keen March winds whistled through the branches of the trees near the old Abbey. Lord North, being the only Member who could anticipate so early an adjournment, was the only one who had his carriage ready for him at the door. On passing through the housekeeper’s room, he bowed to the crowd of his enemies who were waiting for vehicles to convey them to their clubs and firesides ; and, on driving off, the fallen Minister, with a last gleam of that good temper which had so often shone serenely amid the disasters he had brought upon his country, exclaimed, “ Good-night, gentlemen ; you see what it is to be in the secret !”†

Burke was, on that inclement night, in far different mood. He had some reason for his apprehensions. It was

* *Collected Speeches*, vol. ii. p. 347.

† *Wraxall’s Hist. Mem.*, vol. ii. p. 607.

soon seen whether or not he was justified in warning his friends not to consider that all difficulties were over because the first great obstacle had at last been overcome. It was soon seen whether or not he or Conway, or any other illustrious notability with a long pedigree, whose misconduct he had censured, and whom his wisdom had at length brought back into the path of right, was to be one of the Cabinet Ministers in that patriotic Government for which he amid poverty and insult had laid the foundation, and of which his genius had so long been both the support and ornament, at once the stoutest buttress, and the noblest Corinthian pillar.

CHAPTER XXXI.

1782.

PAYMASTER OF THE FORCES.

LORD NORTH had publicly announced his resignation. But Burke knew that another Government was almost as far as ever from being formed. It was even most doubtful whether any arrangement, agreeing with the ideas of the most earnest member of the Opposition, would be settled at all. Finding the Marquis as mild but also as determined as ever, the King, three days after Lord North had positively resigned, sent for Lord Shelburne, and offered to make him Prime Minister. This appointment Shelburne was only too ready to accept; but he knew that, at the moment, he could not stand without the support of the Rockingham party. He afterwards made a virtue of this abnegation of himself; yet none who are acquainted with the politics of that day can fail from seeing, that the diplomatic Earl made a virtue of necessity. He informed his Sovereign that nothing could be done without Lord Rockingham. Anxious to adopt any expedient, except the only one which could remedy the misfortunes of his empire, and which all his most illustrious and wisest subjects agreed in recommending, George III. then made similar overtures to the unscrupulous Lord Gower, who was still looked upon as traditionally the leader of the Bedford party,

though that party could be said to be known only by its corrupt remains. He also prudently declined the undertaking. Sunday, the twenty-fourth of March, arrived; the House of Commons had only adjourned, with many menaces, from the preceding Wednesday until the following Monday: and yet no steps were taken to form a Government which might give satisfaction to Parliament and be beneficial to the nation. The King again sent for Lord Shelburne, and, on that Sunday morning, proposed to treat, through him, with Lord Rockingham, for a new Ministry; but most ungraciously and foolishly refused to have any interviews with the Marquis, who was unquestionably the most upright and disinterested Minister George III. ever employed, or any monarch could hope to employ, until the Government should be finally arranged.

Lord Rockingham might have been excused had he peremptorily declined an offer so insultingly made. But the public interests were all at stake, the public business was all suspended, and the public excitement, since the fall of Lord North became known, had grown greater than the most experienced politician had ever before witnessed. It was necessary to save the country even in spite of the King. Burke, Fox, and the Duke of Richmond, all concurred in advising the Marquis to comply with the form of the negotiation rather than give Lord Shelburne, whom they suspected of flattering and encouraging George III.'s prejudices against themselves and their policy, and whom they knew to be no friend of theirs nor of their connection, the pretence of throwing on them the obloquy of refusing to aid the Sovereign in that unparalleled emergency. Having, therefore, received the assurance that all his stipulations were uncon-

ditionally accepted, Lord Rockingham immediately transmitted a list of his proposed Cabinet to Lord Shelburne. It met with the Earl's approbation. The next day his friend Dunning assured the Commons that arrangements were satisfactorily progressing in the establishment of a new Government, and the House again adjourned until the next Wednesday.

The settlement was, however, far from being so harmonious as Dunning represented. He was himself, personally, the cause of the first open dissension between the two distinct sections of the Ministry. In the list that Lord Rockingham sent to Shelburne he had left a blank at the Chancellorship for the Earl to fill up, as best acquainted with Dunning's intentions. It appears however to have been settled between the King and Shelburne that Thurlow was to continue Lord Chancellor, though this was evidently not Lord Rockingham's intention; and, though he acquiesced in it for the sake of quiet, the blame that has been cast upon him for this compliance was surely most undeserved. Since Dunning was not to hold the Great Seal, it was necessary to find him another office. He was made Chancellor of that Duchy of Lancaster which Burke had proposed to abolish, added to the Cabinet, created a Peer by the title of Lord Ashburton, and awarded a pension of four thousand pounds a year. The first intimation that Lord Rockingham, the Prime Minister, received of the disposal of the Royal honours, was at the levee on Wednesday the twenty-seventh, when the new Peer, with the other great dignitaries of the Cabinet, knelt and kissed the Sovereign's hand.

The reason of this slight was at once apparent. It was evident that Lord Shelburne intended publicly to demonstrate that though Lord Rockingham might be

nominally at the head of the Government, all real power centred in himself, who was understood to have more of George III.'s favour. But the great, powerful, and victorious party led by Burke and Fox in the Commons, and by the Marquis of Rockingham in the Lords, was not to be thus childishly defied. This was a petty game for Shelburne and the King to play at, and they were at once taught a humiliating lesson. An indignant meeting of the party, with both Burke and Fox present, was immediately held at the house of the Marquis in Grosvenor-square. As the insult had been public, the reparation must also be public. It was voted unanimously that Lord Rockingham, to show his power, should at once nominate a Peer, and insist, under the threat of immediate resignation, on the individual chosen for the honour at once kissing hands.

This was done on the following day. George III. and Lord Shelburne, while unfairly aspiring to command, were humbly obliged to obey; and thus did Sir Fletcher Norton, the late Speaker, who, though no direct adherent of the Rockingham party, yet being the only eligible person who could at the moment be fixed on for aristocratic honours, wake up one morning, and to his own surprise and that of everybody else, find himself, under the title of Baron Grantley, a Peer of the realm.*

Lord Shelburne's conduct was strange. He prided himself on his talents for diplomacy and intrigue; but according even to the lowest worldly prudence, nothing surely was ever more impolitic than his actions from the first moment to the last of this excellent Administration. He had only recently confessed to Lord Rockingham, "You could stand without me, but I

* See Wraxall's Hist. Mem., vol. iii. pp. 13-15.

could not stand without you ;" yet he generally showed himself most oblivious of this undeniable fact. Burke himself, in speaking of the small number of Lord Shelburne's followers, expressed an opinion that it was utterly impossible for the Earl to form a Ministry without the Rockingham party. The person to whom the observation was made, officially repeated it to Dunning. The lawyer replied, "Non numeremur, sed ponderemur."* But the weight of Colonel Barré and Dunning in the House of Commons, united, was, however respectable, far inferior to that of Fox or Burke alone. Lord Shelburne had scarcely an aristocratic following at all, while the preponderance of political genius and of moral integrity as well as of landed property, most unquestionably belonged to the disinterested and virtuous Marquis, whose own personal character, too, universally inspired as much confidence as unfortunately that of the affable Earl did distrust.

Instead of endeavouring to remove this distrust, Shelburne acted in such a manner as, among Lord Rockingham's friends, to intensify it into absolute aversion. Instead of sinking the theoretical and practical differences which had distinguished them from their great enemy the late Earl of Chatham, Shelburne had, in the early months of this year, brought them more than ever prominently and offensively forward.

Their bond of union was government by party. They regarded themselves as the hereditary descendants of that patriotic band of Whigs who had placed the House of Brunswick on the throne, and believed, as Burke had so eloquently taught them, that the disruption of party

* Nicholls's *Recollections and Reflections during the Reign of George III.*, p. 40.

connections was the cardinal evil of the age. They therefore combined together, not, as their enemies said, and as an enemy of Burke ridiculously represented him as teaching them,* to oblige the Sovereign to give them as their right the exclusive administration of the Government, but to carry out, when they should be entrusted with the direction of affairs, those principles of freedom on which the great Revolution of 1789 had been made, and on which the reigning dynasty had been established. In contradiction to these doctrines, Lord Shelburne had long maintained, with his master Lord Chatham, the school of Bolingbroke, and the King's friends, that all parties were most unprincipled combinations to humiliate the Sovereign, and to plunder the country. To the intense disgust of the Whig Peers in the House of Lords, and the utter subversion of the principle of Ministerial responsibility, he had, in the most offensive manner, even recently avowed it as his settled conviction, that the King ought to be his own Minister.† The time when this was said made the avowal more extraordinary. It was at the terrible crisis of the American war, when most undoubtedly the King had been his own Minister, and the principal agent in producing all the inglorious disasters under which the nation had lost her noblest colonies, and appeared on the point of sinking into a secondary Power. Orators might declaim, and editors of newspapers write, against the secret advisers throughout the calamitous period just passed in review; but the strong and individual will of George III. may be traced in nearly all the injudicious and violent measures since the fall of Lord Rockingham's former

* Nicholls, in his *Recollections of George III.'s Reign.*

† *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xxii. p. 1003.

Administration ; and it would be estimating Rigby, Jenkinson, and the other members of the corps of King's friends much too highly, to suppose that they had any other merit with their Master than the servile one of encouraging him to pursue steps that his Majesty had himself determined to take. Knowing these circumstances well, Lord Shelburne yet thought fit to offend allies who were indispensable to him, by maintaining, in 1782, the courtly dogma, opposed to the whole spirit of the English Constitution, which pronounces not more emphatically that the King can do no wrong, than that a Minister, without being subjected to the jealous vigilance of Parliament, will very seldom do any right.

To reduce the enormous influence of the Crown, that had been built on the ruins of political combinations, was the first domestic object of the Marquis and his party. Their means were, primarily, Burke's celebrated bills of economical reform, which, when in power, they were determined to carry. Barré and Dunning, rising above the jealousy of their chief, had each, when it was first introduced, been enthusiastic in their praises of the scheme ; yet Lord Shelburne had never omitted an opportunity to speak of it with contempt. It was observed, on the Establishment Bill, in 1781, being defeated for the second time, that, doubtless owing to the Earl's influence, his followers in the Commons, including Barré and Dunning, were all absent from the division, and refrained from giving Burke any support.*

Every domestic question was however in the minds of the Rockinghams of secondary importance in comparison with that of making peace with the Colonies by acknowledging their independence. But Lord Shelburne, in

* Walpole's Journal : Memorials and Corresp. of Fox, vol. i. p. 261.

these very months, had, like his master Lord Chatham, while deprecating the war, ostentatiously declared that this independence ought not to be conceded ; and under his instructions Dunning and Barré had expressed similar sentiments.*

Whatever excuses there may be made for Lord Chatham in shrinking from this stern expedient in 1778, it is difficult to find any for Lord Shelburne on the sixth of March, 1782, after the war with France, Spain, and Holland, the armed neutrality of the Baltic, and the surrender of Cornwallis. Lord Shelburne's own conduct is his own condemnation. Before this same year terminated, in which he pronounced such a decided opinion, he was himself to be the Minister who would negotiate the Peace, and provisionally acknowledge the independence of the Colonies. It is difficult to conjecture how a man so accomplished, able, and versed in diplomacy, could avoid seeing that indispensable necessity which was obvious to the rest of mankind. At all events, from this dilemma there is no escape. If at such a moment Lord Shelburne were sincere in declaring himself against American independence, what can be said for his sagacity ? If he were insincere, what can be said for his honour ?

His statesmanship must be vindicated at the expense of his straightforwardness. There can be very little doubt that as well as others he knew there was no alternative but independence ; but he also knew that

* There can scarcely be a greater historical mistake than to represent Lord Shelburne as only having expressed such opinions in 1778. He maintained them invariably. This difference between the Rockingham and Shelburne parties was the common taunt of the courtiers, and was never disavowed by the Earl, as, had his opinions undergone a change, they could easily have been. See his Speech of March 6, 1782. *Parl. Hist.*, p. 987.

George III. had the greatest reluctance to make this recognition ; and he knew too that the utterance of such opinions would recommend him as a more eligible Minister to the obdurate Sovereign, than the plain and direct Lord Rockingham could ever be regarded. Whoever looks impartially at Shelburne's proceedings at this time, must reluctantly come to the conclusion that he employed against Lord Rockingham all the disingenuous artifices which the Earl's master, Lord Chatham, formerly exerted against the same high-minded politician.

On Burke's mind they produced a similar effect. Never having any reason to think very favourably of Lord Shelburne, he began to regard him, from the first formation of the Cabinet, with a kind of contemptuous abhorrence, which deepened day by day, as he saw the means employed to circumvent the Marquis, to produce divided counsels, and to thwart the great public objects that the virtuous nobleman was, under Burke's own direction, so anxious to attain. Chatham, with all his tricks, was a statesman of great genius, of ardent patriotism, and the creditor of the country he had led to victory. His pupil Shelburne, in following habitually the crooked labyrinth into which Chatham only occasionally stumbled, was encircled by none of that splendid blaze of glory which shed over his master's pompous disingenuities some of the brilliant lustre of virtue. Burke could not, after all, only despise Chatham ; for Shelburne he felt nothing else but angry contempt : and by those who can understand how this sentiment originated and increased, his political actions, under the eventful circumstances of this year and the next, will gradually appear far from inexplicable.

He was himself not in the Cabinet. He was then

right, and Conway, as usual, wrong. The General, whose virtue, like the old china in the repositories of elderly ladies, was so precious that it always rendered those who handled it uncomfortable, became Commander-in-Chief and a member of the Cabinet ; but, on many important questions, he assisted Shelburne in overruling the Rockingham portion of the Ministry, and never suspected that the Earl, who cunningly made use of him, was privately laughing at his unsuspecting innocence.* Lord John Cavendish was made Chancellor of the Exchequer ; the Duke of Richmond, Master-General of the Ordnance ; Admiral Keppel, a Viscount and First Lord of the Admiralty ; the Duke of Grafton, Lord Privy Seal ; Dunning, a Peer, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and a pensioner ; Shelburne himself, one Secretary of State ; Charles Fox, the other, with the leadership of the House of Commons. All these were Members of the Cabinet. But, though Burke had so long been virtually the leader and principal member of the Rockingham party, and though his great plan of economical reform was immediately to be considered in Council, and introduced by himself with all the authority of Government into the House of Commons, yet in this their hour of triumph for him no place in the Cabinet could be found.

This exclusion excited no surprise. It would have been considered more natural had his younger friend, Fox, been made at once Prime Minister, than for Burke to have become a Cabinet Minister. The difference in rank, though not to us very marked, was very strongly maintained. Seats in the Cabinet were not for mere

* "That *innocent man*, General Conway," said Shelburne to Fox, "never perceived that he had the casting vote in the Cabinet."—*Memoirs and Correspondence of Fox*, vol. i. p. 454.

plebeians. Mr. Burke was looked upon as a kind of very excellent upper servant, diligent, faithful, devoted to the interests of his employers, one who took no liberties, and in fact knew his place.

The delegates of the county associations for reform, and the extreme liberals of Brentford and the Guild-hall, might of all people have been expected to complain of this neglect of the great economical reformer. But they saw it with as much indifference as the most supercilious aristocrat. Indeed, among some of the rising politicians in Parliament, eager for representative reform, Burke was far, even then, from being regarded with any peculiar veneration. They knew that whether in or out of the Cabinet, he was Lord Rockingham's intimate friend and political counsellor, and that his influence over the Marquis, the Duke of Richmond, and Charles Fox was very great. But instead of considering with what years of uninterrupted labour, self-sacrificing disinterestedness, and the most splendid exertions of genius, this ascendancy had been won, many of these young and ambitious politicians beheld him with eyes of envy; and knowing that he was originally only the son of a Dublin attorney, they talked privately to each other of his violence, pride, and arrogance.* Lord Shelburne too, who professed to be so eminent a patron of men of letters and science of every denomination, and who certainly took every means to secure the worldly interests of Barré and Dunning, his own personal followers, was far from thinking that Burke had any reason to com-

* See this feeling very strongly displayed throughout Nicholls's *Recollections of the Reign of George III.*: a work of considerable ability, information, and interest, but which, in every allusion to Burke and his political conduct, shows how much narrow illiberality may unconsciously exist in some professed Liberals.

plain of his position in the Ministry. One of the excuses the Earl made for the grant of a pension of four thousand a year for life to Colonel Barré, was that this veteran soldier had given up his claim to a joint share in the valuable but subordinate office which was at last awarded to Burke.*

Barré was at the same time appointed Treasurer of the Navy, a place scarcely inferior to Burke's, while, though himself the most confidential friend of the Prime Minister, Burke had no pension, and held his situation subject to the ordinary political contingencies which from the first threatened to render his official tenure of no long duration.

This office was the Paymastership of the Forces. He succeeded Rigby, who had enjoyed the salary, and the enormous profits of the bank which was held in this office, for more than thirteen years. During that period, and especially throughout the whole American war, when he took to his own use the annual interest of at least a million of money, Rigby's gains had been most enormous. In reply to the defiant jobber, who had boldly declared that he was not weary of receiving the public money, Pitt had, amid expressions of general approbation, recently thundered in his ears that the public was at least weary of paying him. On the American war Rigby, and such men as Rigby, had fattened, and with the termination of the American war the race passed away. The prosperous days of their great representative, and open leader of the King's friends, were over. His hour of reckoning had come. Rigby was soon distressed for the balances of public money remaining in his possession, and dependent on the forbearance of political op-

* Speech of the Earl of Shelburne, Parl. Hist., vol. xxiii. p. 195.

ponents whom in his official days he had treated with merciless insolence. It was observed that with the loss of his place, he lost a great deal of that bold and imperious manner with which he had so long domineered over the House of Commons. Advanced in years, harassed with debts, suffering from the effects of intemperate habits, and considered by the new generation on both sides of the House of Commons as, what he really was, the noxious embodiment of bold flagrant corruption, he was in no condition to start against younger competitors once more in the race of ambition. Though amid the whirlwind of the following year he seemed again about to emerge from the clouds which overshadowed him, it was but a momentary appearance. As a political luminary, if that which was intrinsically so evil can be thought to have any similitude with light, he was on the decline; and his star was fast hastening to its rest in the lowest depths of the effete and unprincipled politicians' hell, where absolute darkness and eternal silence reign.*

There was something of poetical justice in Burke being Rigby's immediate successor. That the most thoroughly immoral public man existing in that age, should be succeeded in the Pay Office by the great philosopher whose most settled principle it was that politics and morality were inseparable, that the one was merely the extension of the other,† and who himself, as every candid and unbiassed inquirer may, contrary to the narrow judgment of a superficial criticism, one day admit, fully carried out that principle both in his political career and in his private history, is a not unpleasing

* See Wraxall's *Hist. Mem.*, vol. iii. p. 277.

† *Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 332.

incident to contemplate in a life which affords few circumstances for such gratification. As Burke entered those official apartments which had been so long the scene of riotous revelry, we may fancy him shuddering at the signs of the late orgies of Rigby and his friends, and, before proceeding to settle in them with a family so opposite in character to that of their former inhabitants, putting the rooms through the necessary ceremony of a rigorous purification. To obliterate the foul stains left by the unclean spirits fostered by the devil of political corruption, was an indispensable preliminary before sitting down in comfort to reform those abuses in which the creatures of evil had luxuriously wallowed.

From the moment of accepting the office, Burke proceeded in his own conduct as though the reforms were already carried out. A fixed salary of four thousand a year was virtually allotted to the new Paymaster ; but he most disinterestedly kept no balances in his own hand, sent these sums at once to the Bank of England, and put down the interest to the account of the public. Young Richard Burke was to be his father's deputy, with a salary of five hundred a year. The brother Richard had some time ago been called to the Bar, and recently appeared with credit before a Committee of the House of Commons, on a disputed election. He was then busily engaged on the Western Circuit, and appeared to have so good a prospect of getting into full practice, that many of his friends considered it scarcely prudent in him to sacrifice his professional interests for any office in the new Ministerial arrangement. But Dick himself was of another opinion. He succeeded Sir Grey Cooper as Senior Secretary of the Treasury ; an appointment of course immediately under the personal control of Lord Rocking-

ham. So little, however, was the change of fortune expected by Burke's family, that when this great political revolution occurred, the two Richards were both absent from London. The brother was attending the Western Circuit, the son in the north of England: and Burke himself was left alone to speculate on the more auspicious future.

At this moment it was not his brother, it was not even his son, whose absence he most regretted. He yearned for the presence of that beloved relative who was then, amid many enemies, pushing his fortune in distant India: and to William Burke, in a letter beginning with "My dear—my ever dear friend," he poured forth all the exulting fulness of his heart. "Why," he wrote, "were you not here to enjoy, and to partake in this great, and I trust, for the country, happy change? All my friends are absent at a moment so important. Oh, my dearest, oldest, best friend, you are far off indeed! May God of his infinite mercy preserve you! Your enemies, your cruel and unprovoked persecutors, are on the ground, suffering the punishment, not of their villany towards you, but of their other crimes, which are innumerable." Burke mentioned, at the same time, that the correspondence with the Indian princes was in Lord Shelburne's department, regretted that it was not in Fox's office, hoped however that something might be done for William; and confidently anticipated that the prosecution of the Indian delinquents, against whom his researches in the Select Committee, following after his cousin's representations, had keenly excited him, would be resolutely pressed.*

At the time when all the interested suitors were crowd-

* Correspondence, vol. ii. pp. 483-5.

ing to Lord Rockingham's, Burke, holding himself aloof, spent many busy hours during the crisis, in this Indian Committee. His seat, with others, being afterwards rendered vacant by his acceptance of office, and Parliament having adjourned for the Easter holidays, he and Lord Rockingham had a fortnight's interval to consider their novel and hazardous position. On Easter Monday a splendid dinner and ball was given, by the Lord Mayor at the Mansion-house, to the Rockingham portion of the Ministry. There was Burke himself, with the Marquis, the Duke of Richmond, Fox, Sheridan, and, it was said, eighteen hundred less distinguished guests. The style of the banquet, the ornaments, the confectioneries, were superior to anything that had yet been known in civic entertainments; and the new Ministers had before their eyes incontestable evidence that their popularity had not deserted them on the threshold of office.*

A week later, on the eighth of April, the Houses again met for business. Ministers appeared on the Treasury bench, and then the full extent of the change was prominently displayed. A new generation had grown up in the period during which Lord North had been in power; people could scarcely remember a time when he was not the leader of the Commons; and Members could at first scarcely realize the situation, or believe the evidence of their senses, as they beheld, on that evening, the unaccustomed aspect of the popular branch of the Legislature. The old Ministers were dispersed on the back benches of the Opposition side of the House. Instead of being carefully attired in full dress, or betraying in their habits their immediate intercourse with the Court, they appeared in great-coats and heavy boots,

* Chronicle of the Annual Register, 1782, p. 204.

like mere ordinary mortals. To the astonishment of everybody, even Welbore Ellis, for the first time, it was said, in his life, was beheld without his Court suit. But strange as was the appearance of the fallen Ministers, the Members composing the new Government, on the Treasury bench, formed a still more startling and even ludicrous sight. Their buff and blue uniforms and rusty frock-coats were thrown aside, and, having just been at Court, they came down in full dress, with their hair carefully powdered, lace on their shirt-frills, ruffles on their wristbands, swords at their sides, and buckles shining brilliantly in their shoes. They, being quite as much surprised as the spectators, stared at their vanquished foes, and at one another. A joke made at their expense was circulated all over London, and occasioned much merriment. Lord Nugent's house had recently been broken open. Among other articles stolen, were several pairs of lace ruffles, which had been particularly advertised by the nobleman with the rest of his missing valuables, in the newspapers. When Parliament met after Easter, he was asked by a friend, whether he had found any of the property. "I can't say I have; but," said the old Lord, indicating Fox and Burke, "I shrewdly suspect that I have seen some of my laced ruffles on the hands of the gentlemen who now occupy the Treasury bench."*

The novelty of this exhibition soon however wore off. Scarcely had all the Ministers taken the oaths, when they were rudely called upon to perform at once, and without deliberation, all the functions of an established Government.

After the concession of a free trade, Ireland had

* See Wraxall's Hist. Mem., vol. iii. pp. 26-28.

received no further attention from Lord North's expiring Ministry. Lord Carlisle, with William Eden, who was afterwards Lord Auckland, as his Chief Secretary, succeeded in the Viceroyalty the Earl of Buckinghamshire, and his scrivener Sir Richard Heron. The volunteers continued in arms, and, under the alarm of invasion which prevailed every year as the Bourbon's fleets hovered off the coasts, were allowed to increase in numbers and in organization. The two great officials who were now charged with the Irish administration were eminent in literature, politics, and diplomacy. One had published poems, the other controversial and political works, in a pleasant style; both had sat at that Board of Works which Burke succeeded in condemning in the House of Commons, and whose good works were, he said, as all good works perhaps ought to be, perfectly invisible; both had been Members of the High Commission to treat for peace with the Americans in 1778, and, well-bred as they were, with polished manners and pacific intentions, found after all the olive-branch they held invitingly in their hands change by some Ovidian metamorphosis, into a still sharper sword.

The same fortune attended them in Ireland. A perpetual Mutiny Bill had some time before been adopted, and it had been publicly censured by Burke in the English House of Commons, and on the hustings of Bristol. It increased the determination of Grattan, who stood forward as the patriotic leader of the Opposition on College Green, and Lord Charlemont, who had a second time been chosen as chief of the volunteers, to free their country from political as well as commercial bondage. The repeal of Poyning's Law had been agitated, and a declaration of rights, freeing the Irish Parliament

altogether from the control of the Privy Council and the English Legislature, proposed. Fuel was added to the flame. When the Houses met in the October of 1781, the conflagration which the surrender of the monopolies by Lord North appeared for a time to have extinguished, broke out again in all its original fierceness and defiant splendour. To make this renewal of independence more formidable, another Bill, restoring to the Catholics many of their religious privileges, was introduced by Mr. Luke Gardiner, and earnestly supported by Grattan.

This Bill is also memorable as having occasioned from Burke's pen a powerful letter to Lord Kenmare. It was in the midst of the final struggle against Lord North, in all the ardour of conscious victory, when he was so much engaged, that he could not sit down consecutively for half an hour at a time, that Burke composed, on February the twenty-first, this epistle; and showed that neither ingratitude, neglect, injustice, nor preoccupation, could prevent him from watching over the progressive emancipation of the Irish Catholics. The Bill relaxed many of the penal statutes against their religious ceremonies, marriages, and education. But, as at first drawn, it also recited elaborately all the civil incapacities, and appeared to Burke more like "a universal, unmitigated, indispensable, exceptionless disqualification," than a measure relieving the great majority of the community from laws still more stringent and severe. He thought the civil rights of men who paid taxes to the Crown, more indispensable to them than any other, because they were their only security against oppression by their fellow-subjects. The justice of allowing the Catholics the exercise of the franchise, of opening to them the legal profession, of giving them the liberty to educate their priests

in colleges at home, and of not excluding them from performing the ordinary duties of citizens, was to him, as he showed in the Letter to the Roman Catholic Peer, an object of greater importance than the utmost latitude in religious ceremonies.* Nevertheless the more liberal clauses of the Bill had his approval. Before it passed into a law, some of the glaring inconsistencies on which he so forcibly commented were removed; and it became what it proposed to be, a small but still a real instalment of justice to the Catholics of Ireland.

While it was under consideration, effective means were taken by the popular leaders to oblige England to concede political independence to their country. The week before Burke wrote his letter to Lord Kenmare, the delegates of one hundred and forty-three corps of the volunteers of Ulster, met by appointment at Dungannon. They declared that the claim of anybody but the King, Lords, and Commons of Ireland to bind their country, was unconstitutional, illegal, and a grievance. They condemned the exercise of the power of the Privy Council under Poyning's Law. At the suggestion of Grattan, who sent them the resolution without consulting Lord Charlemont, they also expressed their joy at the relaxation of the penal laws against the Catholics. The whole nation became then, under Grattan, marshalled as one man. A few days later he again brought forward, in the Irish House of Commons, the question of Irish rights; and he moved an address to the Throne, that Ireland was a free and distinct kingdom, and that none but her own King and Parliament had power to make laws for the country. The Government suc-

* See the Letter to a Peer in Ireland, on the Penal Laws, in Burke's Works.

ceeded in carrying the adjournment against the motion. Far from being discouraged, Grattan announced that he would take the earliest opportunity of once more discussing the claim; and all Members were ordered to attend for this purpose on the sixteenth of April, as they tendered the rights of the Irish Parliament.

In this critical position was Ireland placed when it became known in Dublin that Lord North's Ministry was at an end. Anticipating that the new arrangements would not be favourable to the Lord Lieutenant and himself, the Chief Secretary Eden set off for London with Lord Carlisle's resignation. On his arrival he found that the Viceroy's removal had already been determined upon, and that the Duke of Portland, with Fox's friend Colonel Fitzpatrick as Chief Secretary, would undertake the government of the sister kingdom. Eden, vexed at his own dismissal, affected great indignation at the manner in which Lord Carlisle had been treated in this and other proceedings. He refused to give any information to the Ministers on the state of Ireland, but, to terrify them, intimated that he would immediately declare in Parliament his sentiments on the whole subject.

The threat was fulfilled. No sooner had the Ministers taken the oaths on that first day after the Easter adjournment, than Colonel Luttrell rose, and alluding to the circumstances of Ireland, evidently by previous concert, called on Eden to give the House information on the present condition of that kingdom. Eden readily undertook the task. Entering into some general details, he painted in the darkest colours the situation of the Irish Government, and immediately moved the repeal of the Act of George I., that had become so odious to the Irish patriots. He afterwards added that he was on

the next morning to set out again for Dublin, and that he would be glad to be the instrument of carrying the tidings of that concession which would give so much satisfaction to the Parliament and the people of Ireland.

All this was evidently intended to embarrass the Government. It was therefore felt and reprobated by men of every party in the House. To render Eden's conduct still more inexcusable, he had, by indiscreetly parading five recent Acts of the English Parliament affecting Ireland, himself stimulated the cry for absolute legislative independence. Fox, as Secretary of State and leader of the Commons, inveighed with much ability against the unfairness of calling on men who had just acceded to office to come to a decision on affairs which they could not reasonably have had time to consider. He assured the House that the Ministers had already held several Councils on the state of Ireland ; and that in a very short time, perhaps within twenty-four hours, the attention of Parliament would be called to the subject. Far from being ashamed, Eden still refused to withdraw his motion. The indignation against him increased. General Conway spoke of proposing a vote of censure. Other Members shouted, The Tower ! The Tower ! and, so enraged became the great majority of the House, which on such occasions is never wanting in patriotism, that had not Eden at last given way, a motion for his committal to the Tower could easily have been carried.

Instead of injuring the Ministers, he had unintentionally rendered them a service. He had enlisted the feelings even of their opponents in their favour, and given Fox the opportunity of displaying for the first time, as leader of the House, the readiness of his resources and the manliness of his bearing. His friends

were delighted ; and even his opponents admitted that, with the responsibilities of office, the new Secretary seemed at once naturally to assume the dignity of his exalted position. He contrasted favourably with his easy predecessor. Fox's principles might be really as unsettled as they had formerly been ; in all his aspirations for freedom there might be, as there was to the last hours of his life, a vagueness which rendered them difficult to be reduced to any certain rule for human conduct ; he might, as he was himself sometimes ready to confess, never have read nor thought deeply on any political question : yet from the first moment of his Ministerial elevation in the Commons, he appeared, not like North, the dexterous instrument of others, but a statesman with courage and decision, worthy of being entrusted with the management of great affairs, and of standing forth as the acknowledged leader of men.

The day after Eden's repulse, Fox brought down a message from the Throne recommending the affairs of Ireland to consideration. The Duke of Portland hurried over to Ireland. He arrived two days before the time appointed for bringing on Grattan's motion. The patriot, though prostrate on a bed of sickness, would listen to no proposal for an adjournment. On the sixteenth of April, in an answer to a Royal message similar to that which had been delivered to the English Parliament, he moved an address, containing an uncompromising declaration of the independence of Ireland, and affirming that the causes of all the prevailing discontents were the Act of the 6th of George I., the perpetual Mutiny Bill, and the power which the Privy Council exercised over Bills under Poyning's Law. Grattan's eloquence and the popular enthusiasm were irresistible. The Lord Lieutenant and

his accomplished Secretary could only bow their heads to the storm.

It was now imperative on the British Ministers to come to a decision. Burke corresponded anxiously with the Duke of Portland. He used all his influence with Fox and Lord Rockingham. The result of his earnest counsels, and of their own enlightened sentiments, was, that on the seventeenth of May, the repeal of the Act of George I. was moved simultaneously in both Houses. Burke made a pathetic speech, in which all the old affection for his native country found an utterance from his lips. "It is not," said he, "on this day, when there is no difference of opinion, that I will rise to fight the battle of Ireland. Her cause is nearest my heart. Nothing gave me so much satisfaction, when I was first honoured with a seat in this House, as the hope that I might, in some way or other, be of service to the country that gave me birth. I have always thought to myself that, if such an insignificant Member as I am should ever be so fortunate as to render an essential service to England, and my Sovereign and Parliament were going to reward me, I should say to them, 'Do something for Ireland; do something for my country, and I shall be over-rewarded.'" He spoke also with much tenderness on his friendship for the Irish people whom he did not know, and who would never know him; and, maintaining the interests of the two countries to be inseparable, he affirmed that the best friend of Ireland would also prove himself the best friend of England.*

The Bill was carried without a division. Affairs being really in a most urgent state, and the Ministers determined on concession, the repeal met with little re-

* *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xxiii. p. 33.

sistance, and was speedily pushed through both Houses. Ireland was in a fervour of gratitude, not to Burke, who was scarcely thought of at all, but to Grattan, who at the favourable moment had succeeded in directing the energies of the people to the goal of independence. The Parliament voted money to purchase their orator an estate, and proposed to erect to him a sculptured monument. Grattan indeed found his countrymen as enthusiastic in his favour then, as they had been in their admiration of Burke in 1778 ; and in a very few months afterwards he experienced, as Burke had done, how little stability there was in that devotion which had been so ardently professed. These two noble Irishmen both learnt, by stern personal experience, that the violent attachment of an impulsive people has much resemblance to the similar attachment in an impulsive woman, that the more sudden and enthusiastic is the love of the moment, the less likely it is to be lasting and deep. Happy the patriot, happy the individual, who can wisely estimate both impulses at their real value !

Burke wished however to turn the enthusiasm of his countrymen for Grattan to some account. A young stuccoist named Hickey, who died prematurely, had recently come over to England, and been as earnestly protected by Burke, as Barry had formerly been. No pains were spared by the generous patron to promote the young man's success. He modelled that bust of Burke of which an excellent engraving was afterwards published, and may still be bought at the printsellers'. The original statue in the Medal Room of the British Museum is almost the only authentic image of Burke that, so strange has been his fate, while so many monuments have been erected to contemporaries infinitely his inferiors in genius and virtue,

the English public have yet had it in their power to contemplate. Taking the opportunity of congratulating Lord Charlemont on the great but bloodless victory that Ireland had achieved, and rejoicing in the handsome recognition of Grattan's services which the Irish Parliament was about to make, Burke earnestly recommended Hickey to the noble patriot's attention, and wished him to be employed in producing the sculpture of the proposed monument. "If you employ him," wrote the Paymaster of the Forces, "you will encourage the rising arts in the decoration of the rising virtue of Ireland; and though the former in the scale of things is infinitely below the latter, there is a kind of relationship between them."*

While thus attentive to the private interests of the humblest individuals, Burke was busily occupied with the greatest affairs of the empire. Though apparently in a subordinate situation, the Paymaster was in truth the Ministerial Atlas with the world upon his shoulders. He was soon reminded by General Smith of the labour that was to be done in Indian Reformation, and asked to continue, in office, as he had done in Opposition, his incessant labours in the Select Committee. Being thus personally called upon, he pledged himself to follow up the work. The promise was even more than fulfilled. Burke, with so many other things upon his hands, was as busy in his Select Committee, as Henry Dundas, who, being for the moment out of office, had little else to do, was in his Secret Committee. At this time they endeavoured to emulate each other: Dundas's Committee branding by reports and resolutions the crimes of Warren Hastings, Sir Thomas Rumbold, and others who had been engaged in the pecuniary transactions with the Nabob of

* Letter of Burke to Lord Charlemont, in Hardy, vol. ii. p. 46.

Arcot ; Burke's Committee also, with reports and resolutions, stigmatizing Sullivan, the Chairman of the Court of Directors, and Sir Elijah Impey, the Chief-Justice at Bengal. The time soon came when Dundas violently changed his course, and with the most flagrant inconsistency became the protector of the Indian officials whom he was now reprobating. In office and out of office, with public opinion in his favour and with public opinion against him, Burke would never for one moment falter or turn aside from the direct road through that Indian ground in which he was now taking the most vigorous steps, on what he conscientiously believed to be a righteous mission of punishment to the oppressor, and of mercy to the oppressed. A Bill of pains and penalties was introduced against Sir Thomas Rumbold. An address to the Throne was carried recalling Sir Elijah Impey from that seat of justice which he had so foully dishonoured. Burke was meditating deeply on the provisions of a permanent Bill for reforming the Indian judicature on the noblest principles, and in drawing it up intended employing the pen of the accomplished Orientalist William Jones, who, in sending him classical translations, Mahomedan law tracts, and scarce volumes on the manners and customs of the Persians, confided to him all the mortifications and delays he had to endure from the Chancellor Thurlow before obtaining that Indian judgeship which was the great object of this scholar's ambition.*

But however important might be the concessions to Ireland, and the projected reforms of the Indian Government, they were not at the moment regarded as the crowning measures of the second Rockingham Administration. The test of their sincerity was considered the

* Correspondence, vol. ii. pp. 454, 487.

carrying out, as Ministers, the great scheme for economical reform which Burke had twice introduced in Opposition, and to which the party was so deeply pledged. Lord Shelburne endeavoured to obstruct these intended reformatory measures. Several Cabinet Councils were early held, in which it required all Fox's determination, to overcome the aversion of the other section of the Ministry to Burke's Bill for the Regulation of the Civil Establishment. Lord Rockingham had similar obstacles to encounter in the King's Closet. The secret enemies of the scheme said that all the reforms really desirable might be carried out in detail, or by the Crown, without the interference of the Legislature. To such a course Burke was on principle decidedly opposed. Perhaps in our day some of the administrative reformers, who profess highly liberal principles, have not, in their eagerness to see their crude projects effected, shown an equal zeal and foresight in guarding the privileges of the House of Commons. "If," said Burke to Lord Rockingham, "the reform could be kept out of Parliament, under pretence of being done by the Crown, it ought not. The House of Commons can alone give it both grace and permanence . . . If we let slip Parliament, we let slip all. This is our only security against cabal and intrigue; and if that cabal and intrigue should force us out, you have spread the carpet of a fair reputation, to receive you in your fall."*

He drew up a speech which the Marquis was to make to the King, in explanation of a plan against which his Majesty was known to be strongly prejudiced. The Prime Minister, instead of delivering it verbally, threw the observations into the form of a letter, and sent them

* Correspondence, vol. ii. pp. 467, 468.

to the Sovereign. A kind of compromise was settled. The King consented to take the initiative, by a Royal Message recommending these economical reforms to the consideration of Parliament; but some of them were tacitly given up, and the scheme was to be of a less extensive nature than as it had been originally proposed.

Burke himself, in the Commons, most appropriately, was the mover of the Address in answer to the Royal Message. He felt the novelty of his appearance in such a capacity. He exulted in the change which seemed to have come over the Court, Parliament, and the nation, and at the happy prospect which seemed now afforded himself and his friends in being the instruments of conferring so many benefits on their country. He exclaimed enthusiastically, “It is the best of Messages, to the best of people, from the best of Kings.” Giving way to the sensibility of his nature, tears, as he spoke, were seen rolling down his cheeks. The great supporters of corruption were cowed, and knew not what to think or say. There was but little discussion and no opposition. The Address was unanimously voted.

In the House of Lords the scene was not so harmonious. Lord Shelburne was there the mover of the corresponding Address. Instead of admitting that the plan of economy was similar to that which Burke had twice before introduced in the other House, the Earl declared that the Bill to be brought in was essentially different; and, on this occasion, in the presence of Lord Rockingham, Shelburne thought fit to speak contemptuously and disparagingly of the great scheme which had been associated with Burke’s name.*

Lord Shelburne’s observations were not only unfair

* Parl. Hist., vol. xxii. p. 1274.

to his colleagues, and particularly to Burke. They were totally unjustified by facts. Some weeks later, Burke brought forward the Bill to discharge the debts contracted upon the Civil List, to regulate payments, so that encumbrances should not again be incurred, and to suppress useless offices; and, though the Principality of Wales, the Duchy of Lancaster, the Ordnance, the Mint, and the Treasurership and Cofferership of the Household, were not swept away; and some of them, particularly the Duchy of Lancaster, had been preserved to the remaining fund of corruption by Lord Shelburne's own efforts: the measure introduced was still Burke's Civil Establishment Bill, with many of its most important provisions. If the reforms were not so sweeping as had formerly been promised; if their author had been obliged to submit to prejudices and hostilities which he could not vanquish; if many curtailments had been made, so that the amount of money saved was not so large, nor the places abolished so numerous as they would otherwise have been: still the economical principle of reform was preserved, many gross abuses were removed, much courtly influence was done away with, and, so far as it went, all that the measure effected was really beneficial, and permanently gainful to the public. Burke's old antagonist, Lord Nugent, attempted to defeat the Bill, but he was not supported by any party, and the great measure was resolutely pushed forward.

The work of Reform was carried on with a high hand. A Bill excluding contractors from Parliament, and a Bill preventing Revenue Officers from voting at elections, like measures that had for many years been unsuccessfully brought forward, were both supported by Burke and all the forces of the Administration. They passed

with little difficulty through the House of Commons. Their most dangerous enemy was in the House of Lords. The Lord Chancellor Thurlow acted with more ability in the second Rockingham Administration the same ungracious part that the Lord Chancellor Northington played in the Marquis's former Government. Undeterred by Burke and Fox, who, to intimidate him, and to show the personal interest they took in these measures, generally attended the discussions on them in the House of Lords, and were seen standing prominently together on the steps of the Throne, Thurlow both spoke and voted against the Bills, and exerted all his powers to defeat these favourite measures of his more enlightened colleagues. His Opposition however was ineffectual. These two most valuable laws were, with many other blessings, the works of Lord Rockingham's brief Government.

Each day on which the House met, some positive good was done, or some existing evil destroyed. Annually a resolution or Bill had been proposed, to reverse the declarations of the seventeenth February, 1769, respecting the Middlesex election. Wilkes now again moved and triumphantly carried, that this shameful resolution should be expunged from the Journals. The motion was of course supported by Burke and the Government ; yet, so strong were Fox's early prejudices, that he not only spoke against it, but also divided against it, with Lord North, Rigby, and all the most servile of the late band of King's Friends.

With equal firmness Burke himself adhered to unpopular convictions, which, whether right or wrong, were much more worthy of respect than Fox's notions on the Middlesex elections. Pitt moved for a Committee to inquire into the state of the representation. Savile, Turner, and Fox spoke in favour of the inquiry ; but it was observed

with some surprise that Burke retired from the House. The truth was, that totally dissenting in principle from any plan to change at that time the Representation, he had been earnestly entreated by Fox not to injure the Government by showing that one of its most distinguished members was opposed to the popular ideas on reform.

Shortly afterwards the question was partly revived by* Sawbridge's annual motion for shortening the duration of Parliaments. On this occasion Burke was not to be controlled. He replied to Pitt with great energy and vehemence. The friends of reform thought him most magnanimously indiscreet, and sarcastically depicted him as screaming with passion, and swearing that Parliaments were quite as short as they ought to be; but those who agreed with him in opinion were delighted with a speech that they considered to be as full of matter and as powerful in argument as it was delivered with all the graces of elocution.* The majority was certainly with Burke.

After the defeat of Sawbridge's motion, the House adjourned for a few days. Before it again met, the news of a great naval victory arrived, which caused exultation in every patriotic bosom, and began to disperse some of the dark clouds that had so long pressed with ever increasing weight on the British Empire.

Rodney had returned to the West Indies with the resolute determination of saving Jamaica. It was time. The hands of the enemy were already outstretched to grasp with confident eagerness that inestimable prize. The settlements of Demerara and Essequibo, after being taken

* Contrast the different accounts of Burke's speech contained in Sheridan's letter to Fitzpatrick, of the 20th of May, and in Wraxall's *Hist. Mem.*, vol. iii. p. 99. See also *Parl. Hist.*, vol. xxiii. p. 50.

by the English, were recaptured by the French, and restored to their allies the Dutch. In the February of this year St. Christopher's had also at last fallen. The loss of Nevis and Montserrat followed. De Grasse, with thirty ships of the line, seemed able to effect anything that he might think fit to undertake. As soon, therefore, as he should be joined by a Spanish fleet and army from Cuba and Hispaniola, which would render the combined forces amount to some sixty line-of-battle ships, the doom of Jamaica must, in their opinion, be inevitably sealed. At this crisis, Rodney, with a reinforcement of twelve ships of the line, joined Sir Samuel Hood. Their strength being then about equal to their adversary, they determined to attack him as soon as ever he should put to sea from Martinico, and before he could join the Spanish squadron. The enemy was observed, on the 8th of April, standing out of the bay with a large convoy, and evidently with the intention of dropping down, unmolested, to Hispaniola. Rodney immediately gave chase. The French were under Dominica when they beheld the English spreading every sail in pursuit. A fierce but partial engagement was fought the next day. The French Admiral drew off; and, on the eleventh, having passed Guadalupe, his fleet was seen far to windward. It seemed almost hopeless for the British to continue the pursuit, when they observed two of De Grasse's damaged ships fall off from the rest. The chase was renewed with such great spirit that, in a few hours, the French Admiral had no choice but either to see his two lagging vessels taken or to fight. He boldly bore down to the rescue. Evening being then far advanced, by common consent the battle was deferred until the next day. But as the sun rose, on the morning of the twelfth of April, the contest

began ; and it was not until the golden light was setting at eve amid the tropical waves, that the struggle gloriously terminated in the complete triumph of the British, and with the capture of the French admiral, De Grasse, and of his noble flag-ship, of one hundred and ten guns, called the Ville de Paris, which was the pride and boast of the French Navy. Rodney had put in practice a celebrated manœuvre for breaking the enemy's line, and had thus solved a problem which had hitherto rendered almost every naval engagement throughout the War unsatisfactory, but of which the solution by this gallant Admiral prepared the way for many future victories. He could scarcely believe in his own decisive success. Long after daylight had passed away, and the sudden darkness characteristic of those latitudes had set in, he sat in an arm-chair, on the quarter-deck of his flag-ship, the Formidable, bursting forth into loud exclamations of joy, and exultingly contemplating, as the moon rose, the magnificent proportions of the Ville de Paris, whose huge sides looked down upon her insignificant conqueror.*

The joy of the people at home almost equalled that of the victorious Admiral. Such a naval success in this unhappy war brought with it all the pleasure of novelty. It had been so unexpected, and Rodney's proceedings at Eustatius had excited so much displeasure among the present Ministers, that they had already superseded him in his command. With the sentiments both Burke and Fox had expressed, this recall was perfectly consistent : whether, however, it was politic to carry it into effect after the news of the victory had arrived, and especially since Admiral Pigot, Rodney's appointed successor, had not yet left England, is most questionable.

* Ann. Reg. 1782, pp. 203-210. Wraxall's Hist. Mem., iii. 112.

The Ministers felt themselves pledged. This pledge they redeemed at the hazard of their popularity. Rodney was made a Baron, the thanks of the two Houses were voted to him; but these honours were thought insufficient, when set against the recall of the brave Admiral in the moment of success. Burke was maliciously reminded of the Parliamentary prosecution with which he had menaced Rodney. It had now become, he answered, merely a question of prudence; and he would with pleasure allow the matter to rest. "If," said he, "there be a bald spot on the head of Rodney, I have no objection to cover it with laurels."*

He was throughout this period busily engaged on his Civil List Bill and the Bill for regulating his own office. He was frequently told that the tasks were hopeless. Against supineness, indolence, and neglect, he however nobly struggled. His labours were incessant. They were however rewarded by success. Both Bills were most favourably received; and for better despatch, the Pay Office Bill was read twice on one day. At such patriotic exertions, the voice of envious criticism was mute. Even party spirit could say nothing against the assiduity, the invention, and the disinterestedness of the great reforming Paymaster-General. Members were loud in his applause. Happy in his position, happy in his success, and apparently happy in his future prospects, through those days of May and June, though busy in his official duties, he lived a brief hour of joyous sunshine. Earnestly sought after in his few moments of relaxation, he was the pride and delight of every circle into which he deigned to enter. All were glad of a notice from Mr. Burke, the brilliant author, the renowned orator,

* Parl. Hist., vol. xxiii. p. 85.

the confidential friend of the Prime Minister, the labo-rious Paymaster of the Forces, the triumphant economical reformer.

He spent one pleasant day at Sir Joshua's. There a young authoress, whose novel of *Evelina* she had been made happy on being told that he had sat up all night reading, was introduced to him; and with her, as the scene is about to close, we may cast one lingering glance at Burke in this auspicious season.

Sir Joshua and his eldest niece, Miss Palmer, called for Miss Burney and her father, one June morning, and drove them to Reynolds's country house, next door to the Star and Garter, on Richmond Hill. On the terrace, they met Burke's brother Richard. Tall, handsome, and humorous, he was, as Secretary of the Treasury, even more than usually full of frolic and fun. He was asked how he came: "With Mrs. Burke, or alone?" "Alone." "What, on horseback?" "Ay sure," he replied laughing, and then, playfully alluding to the political success of himself and his friends, added, with a flourish of the hand, "Up and ride! Now's the time!" Ride fast, Dick, for that time may be very short.*

Sir Joshua and his guests returned to the house. Burke, engaged in his official business, was, as Miss Burney was informed, scarcely expected. She and Reynolds were standing at the window of the drawing-room, admiring the beautiful scenery so charmingly spread out below, when a large party suddenly entered, without being announced, and approached their host in the familiar manner of friends who, being sure of their reception, were perfectly at home. One of these visitors, a lady to whom Sir Joshua immediately hastened with the most respectful

* Madame D'Arblay, *Diary and Letters*, vol. ii. p. 144.

and cordial greeting, was Mrs. Burke. Quiet, pleasing, and sensible, though reserved, she at once made a very favourable impression on the fair authoress. Young Richard Burke, Miss Burney had met before in town. He entertained an unobtrusive but real admiration for the daughter of Dr. Burney, took a pleasure in being at her side, and for some time after this meeting, whenever they were in the same society, quietly accompanied her as her shadow. There was in the party a little gentleman with cheeks so fat and chubby that they threatened to render his nose quite invisible, a manner so mild that it was almost effeminate, a voice of the most studied precision in its accents, and the smallest and neatest of feet which described with great vivacity a kind of circle as their owner obsequiously bowed almost to the ground on being introduced, as Mr. Gibbon, to the modest and retiring but also keen and observant authoress of *Evelina*. The figure of another stranger, who was not immediately introduced to her, but whom she instinctively guessed to be the great man she was so desirous of knowing, singularly contrasted with that of the learned historian of the Roman Empire. With a commanding air, a noble carriage, a graceful address, and an eye beaming with kindness and animation on all who approached him, the Unknown, she thought, was and could be no other than Edmund Burke.

It was he indeed. Dinner being immediately announced, he was observed to take Sir Joshua's arm on going downstairs, and whisper some words in the trumpet at the artist's ear. As Reynolds sat down at the head of the table, he said, "Come, Miss Burney, will you take a seat next mine? And then Mr. Burke shall sit on the other side." "Oh no, indeed," replied the tall, handsome, learned, and pert Miss Shipley, daughter of

the Bishop of St. Asaph ; “ I shan’t agree to that. Mr. Burke must sit next me ; I won’t consent to part with him. So pray come and sit quiet, Mr. Burke.” Burke with a smile immediately did as he was commanded. Sir Joshua then mildly remarked, “ I only proposed it to make my peace with Mr. Burke ; for he has been scolding me all the way downstairs for not having introduced him to Miss Burney. However, I must do it now. Mr. Burke—Miss Burney.” They partly rose, and saluted each other. “ I have been complaining to Sir Joshua,” said Burke, “ that he left me wholly to my own sagacity, which however did not here deceive me.”

Miss Burney was of course delighted, though also, as ever, shy and demure. Richmond is still yearly gay and laughing in the summer’s sun and the rich green of its trees. The Thames still meanders with a glittering stream between those pleasant banks. But the guests at Sir Joshua’s dinner table have all passed away. The last survivor prominently known to this generation, was that fair young authoress, then made happy by Burke’s society and compliments, and only remembered by many still living as an aged and secluded invalid. Yet the sketch she preserved of his conversation on that day is still vivid and characteristic.

She found Burke much beyond what even she was prepared to expect. He was at the climax of health, of political renown, and even of worldly success ; and nothing could be more gentle than his bearing, nothing more genial than the philanthropy which it seemed to be his single wish to diffuse. He made one frank confession, which all who understand the antagonism of himself and Chatham, can easily appreciate. The character of the great Earl was, he said, the only subject on which

he did not speak with the same openness in the House of Commons, as at his own table ; but though not concurring in every point with the enthusiasm of the people for the great patriot, he did not attempt to oppose their cry. He launched out, however, in the most enthusiastic praises of Chatham's favourite son, young William Pitt, as one not only possessing “ the most extraordinary talents, but as gifted by nature with the judgment which others acquire by experience. Though judgment,” he afterwards added, “ is not so rare in youth as is generally supposed. I have commonly observed that those who do not possess it early, are apt to miss it late.”

Miss Shipley remarked, with pride, that she had just received a letter from Dr. Franklin. Burke immediately expatiated on the scientific ability, political knowledge, and liberal sentiments of the American philosopher ; and then proceeded to remark how few persons there were who, like Franklin, maintained all the vigour of their mental powers to a very advanced age. This led him to discuss the character of that celebrated Regent of Castile and octogenarian Minister in the early part of Charles the Fifth's reign, Cardinal Ximenes, of whom it has been observed, with unconscious sarcasm, that, of all the Prime Ministers mentioned in history, he is the only one his contemporaries have revered as a saint.*

Burke was as enthusiastic for Ximenes as the Castilians had formerly been. “ He could go,” he said, “ no further. Ximenes was perfection.” On pausing, however, a general silence made Burke understand that his hearers were still eager to hear his sentiments. He proceeded to illustrate the Cardinal's character with such exquisite felicity and splendid eloquence, that Miss

* See Robertson's *Charles the Fifth*, Part I.

Burney was quite enraptured. "He was," said she, "so flowing, so noble, so divinely eloquent upon the life, conduct, and endowments of this Cardinal, that I felt as if I had never before known what it was to listen. I saw Mr. Burke, and Mr. Burke only. I seemed suddenly organized into a new intellectual existence." At length, overcome by his own admiration, Burke abruptly became silent, and, fearing that he had grown too serious during the dessert, rose to help himself to some fruit. Miss Burney's eyes were still fixed upon him, and her head stretched forward to catch every word he uttered. Seeing her attention, he gaily added, "No imagination, not even the imagination of Miss Burney, could have invented a character so extraordinary as that of Cardinal Ximenes; no pen, not even the pen of Miss Burney, could have described it adequately."*

With a succession of similar playful remarks and compliments, in which Burke's kindness and delicacy were invariably displayed, the afternoon was happily spent. Miss Burney and her father were invited to Beaconsfield. They always regretted that they had not accepted the invitation at this period of Burke's life, when all the world seemed to smile upon him, and he so benignly returned the smile. Who can refrain from lamenting that the serenity of this prospect was soon to be so darkly overcast? Who can refrain from lamenting that a long and prosperous period of official life did not, from this time forward, reward Burke's many years of uninterrupted struggle in Opposition? His temper would then have remained as gentle as it was naturally amiable. His sensibility would then have had a perpetual opportunity of displaying itself by deeds

* See Madame D'Arblay's *Memoirs of Dr. Burney*, vol. ii. pp. 219-234.

of benevolence in that wide field which Office opens for doing good, as some recompense for the care it at the same time entails on the philanthropic statesman. These regrets are, however, vain. They are also unwise. Why attempt to scrutinize with our poor human vision the unerring Divine decree?

The thunderbolt was about to fall. While Burke was so pleasantly enjoying himself at Sir Joshua's, and communicating enjoyment to all with whom he came in contact, that beloved Marquis whose private counsels he had so often shared, and whose good intentions he had so frequently fortified, was lying at Wimbledon, sick unto death. His constitution being always delicate, had gradually become weaker, and had certainly not been strengthened by the labours and responsibilities of Government at that most anxious time. In addition to a complaint of water on the chest, he was attacked by influenza, then a new epidemic in England, and, during this summer, fatally prevalent. He appeared for the last time in the House of Lords, on the second of June, when he spoke with vigour and clearness in favour of the Bill under consideration, for excluding officers of revenue from voting at elections. His indisposition was, however, so very apparent, that it was even alluded to by himself in his speech. He gradually grew worse. Abandoning the business of Administration to his colleagues, he left town for the air and repose of the country. Much depended on the life of that one Marquis. The pacification of America, the great proposed reforms in domestic affairs, the union of jealous and ambitious statesmen, who were secretly intriguing against each other, and only kept from openly assailing each other by his mild and conciliating ascendancy, the personal

fortunes of Burke himself, and the success of the great schemes he entertained of progress and improvement ; all seemed to be suspended, as by a single thread, on that frail existence. The Angel of Death, riding on the blasts of the epidemic, had in those weeks passed over many a humble household : and now, with outstretched wings, the fatal messenger prepared for a flight over the noble roof at Wimbledon, beneath which the overtired Prime Minister of England was lying.

Lord Rockingham had been so frequently ill and had recovered, that neither Burke nor Fox were at all prepared for their leader's departure. But, on the last days of June, the Marquis himself knew that he was dying. He prepared himself for the summons with all that calm courage and unpretending resignation which were so admirably in harmony with the other fine features of his character. One thing there was upon his mind. On the twenty-ninth of June, he sent an express for John Lee, then Solicitor-General. Lee was on the following morning at the Marquis's bedside. "My dear Lee," said Lord Rockingham, "there is a piece of business I wish you to execute immediately, as there is no time to be lost. Various pecuniary transactions have passed between me and my admirable friend Edmund Burke. To the best of my recollection, I have given up every bond or other document, and also added the fullest discharges ; but lest my memory should have failed me, I desire you, as a professional man, to make out a codicil to my will, cancelling every paper that may be found containing any acknowledgment of a debt due to me from Edmund Burke." Lee immediately drew up the codicil. The next day Lord Rockingham gently expired.*

* This anecdote is well authenticated. "Mr. Lee," says Dr. Bisset,

Burke was soon informed by the Marquis's nephew and heir, the Earl of Fitzwilliam, that certain bonds found among Lord Rockingham's papers were cancelled by this codicil to his will.* It is to be regretted that, from motives of delicacy, no further positive information has been given respecting those pecuniary relations between Burke and Lord Rockingham; and that a mystery has been made of what was, after all, most proper, natural, and creditable to both. In 1767, when Lord Rockingham refused to return again to office, and Burke, though in very straitened circumstances, adhered faithfully to his noble leader, it then occurred to the Marquis that it was incumbent on him to do something for the fortune of his devoted friend. He advanced ten thousand pounds to Burke, on a bond which it was understood would never be reclaimed. With those ten thousand pounds, five thousand raised on mortgage from a Dr. Saunders in Spring Gardens, and other eight, doubtless obtained from the successful speculations of William and Richard Burke in Indian stock, Burke purchased the estate of Gregories. After the reverses of his relatives, in the year 1769, all the money they had advanced to him was required. Lord Rockingham again came forward. From that time, through many years of opposition, as Burke's fortune, so far from increasing, actually diminished under his unvarying generosity and the requirements of his position, this noble friend was his constant and unfailing resource. The loss of the Agency for New

“related the circumstance to a brother counsellor, who lately communicated it to the writer.”—*Life of Burke*, vol. ii. p. 127. In confirmation of the statement, the letter summoning Lee to Wimbledon will be found in the *Memoirs and Correspondence of Lord Rockingham*, vol. ii. p. 484.

* *Correspondence*, vol. ii. p. 492.

York, the Marquis endeavoured to compensate by frequent loans. At the time of Lord Rockingham's death he may, on different occasions extending over fourteen years, have perhaps advanced, on bonds which, though never formally required, Burke insisted on giving, the sum of about thirty thousand pounds.*

This amount of Burke's obligations to the Marquis may appear large. But it can only be in appearance. The years in which Burke had laboured in the cause of Lord Rockingham, the genius he had displayed in advising and defending all his most important acts of Office and Opposition, the wisdom of the counsel he had given, and the halo of immortal glory he had thrown round that British Peer, who, however respectable, virtuous, and high-minded, had not in himself those vigorous and dazzling abilities which could elevate their possessor to the first rank among political leaders, were services of which the value cannot be estimated in money. It was Burke who made Lord Rockingham a statesman; it was Burke who raised him to a niche in the temple of British worthies; it was Burke who carved the statue, wrote the epitaph, and who supplied the materials which rendered the memorial more durable than marble or brass. The apparent position of the two men was really reversed: Burke was in fact the creditor, and Lord Rockingham the debtor. So much, indeed, was this the case, that, as Lord Rockingham left no direct heir to his great estates, and his title expired with him,

* The manner in which Burke obtained the money for the purchase of his estate has, I think, been correctly stated by Bissett, in his *Life of Burke*, vol. i. p. 166. The other statements respecting the pecuniary transactions between Burke and Lord Rockingham, I give on the authority of a friend to whom the late Lord Fitzwilliam communicated the particulars, from his private sources of information.

we may perhaps regret that he did not at the time of his death leave to Burke a sufficient legacy to place him in a state of absolute independence. Burke himself, it has been said, expected some such testimony of regard on the part of the Marquis ; but whatever he may have expected, it is certain that he received nothing more than he had already obtained. Being however left in office, and with his political success apparently established, he might, in Lord Rockingham's opinion, count on his Ministerial prospects as an ultimate fortune.

To render, however, his future more precarious than it had ever been since he entered public life, Lord Rockingham was scarcely cold before the Paymastership of the Forces passed into other hands, and Burke was again out of office.

Between Fox and Shelburne there had been, from the formation of the Ministry, a continued struggle for ascendancy. Fox was Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the very department in which Shelburne was considered to excel ; and yet the Earl, as Secretary for the Home Department, had, on the abolition of the Third Secretarieship of State, the management of the Colonies. As negotiations for peace were to be begun, this arrangement was most absurd. Through Lord Shelburne's department went all confidential communications with the Colonial agents ; while through the Foreign Office all negotiations with foreign courts were necessarily carried on. The consequence was, that the business of making overtures for peace was conducted by two separate Ministers, and two separate agents at Paris, each jealous of the other, and eager to thwart the other. Fox's agent was his friend, the Hon. Thomas Grenville ; while Lord Shelburne's emissary was a plain merchant, called Oswald,

who was certainly no match for the venerable but astute Dr. Franklin. But for this very reason the Pennsylvanian philosopher preferred Oswald, and withdrew his confidence from Mr. Grenville, who, being of a susceptible temperament, felt his pride wounded, and wrote off to Fox many verbose epistles, complaining of the treatment he met with as his friend's negotiator. Such representations Fox was himself only too ready to receive. He was frequently outvoted in the Cabinet, particularly on the propriety of unconditionally acknowledging the independence of America. On the day before Lord Rockingham died, Fox had again called another Cabinet Council at his own house, on this question ; and finding himself again in a minority, announced that nothing but the Marquis's illness prevented him from immediately resigning. When the news, therefore, of the Prime Minister's death arrived, everything tended to produce an immediate rupture of the Government.

The King appointed Lord Shelburne Prime Minister. The Duke of Portland was nominated by Fox, who, finding that this proposal was not accepted, precipitately resigned. Lord John Cavendish followed him in his retreat ; and Burke also threw up his office.

As it afterwards became the custom to blame Burke for every imprudent step taken by his party, this retirement of the Rockingham section of the Cabinet was long, among his enemies, almost universally ascribed to his intense dislike of Lord Shelburne. The recent publication of authentic documents has, however, completely disproved this assertion. As a reproach against Burke, it has been at last abandoned even by Fox's relatives, who have felt themselves compelled to admit that it was their own favourite statesman's rivalry with Lord Shelburne to

obtain possession of the Treasury, either in person or by proxy, that this retirement was mainly if not exclusively owing. From a paper in Burke's handwriting, and signed with his initials, it indeed appears that, so far from counselling an immediate resignation, he advised Fox to act with management. As the session was just closing, nothing effective could be done until the next meeting of Parliament. By relinquishing office at that moment, therefore, Fox would leave Lord Shelburne in possession of the field; while, as the Rockingham section of the Ministry was by far the most powerful in numbers, Fox, by remaining in the Cabinet until the next session, would, in the war that must ensue between the rivals, fight on the high ground with the House of Commons at his back. This was Burke's advice, and it was surely good. Nor did he, as has been said, only advocate the leadership of the Duke of Portland; but he was prepared to stand by Fox himself as the proper candidate for the first place.* Fox's pride and jealousy, however, were not to be controlled. Burke as faithfully followed him out of office as he was ready to remain with him in the Government, at a much greater sacrifice, since Fox, as the leader of the Ministry in the House of Commons, would under any circumstances have been equal in political rank to the Prime Minister, while as Paymaster of the Forces under Lord Shelburne, Burke must have been a much humbler person, with regard to power and influence, than he had been as Paymaster of the Forces under Lord Rockingham.

Sir Edward Walpole held the Clerkship of the Pells, a sinecure worth about seven thousand a year. From some

* See the paper signed E. B., in Fox's Memorials and Correspondence, vol. i. p. 457.

yet unpublished journals, it appears, that before Lord John Cavendish and his other friends had actually left office, Burke called on Horace Walpole and asked him to propose to his brother the resignation of that office in favour of young Richard Burke, on condition that the full yearly value of it, and another small place, should be secured to Sir Edward Walpole. Horace thought the proposal altogether impracticable, and persuaded Burke to abandon it; but, according to his nature, preserved the details of this confidential negotiation as a damning criminatio of Burke for omitting the office of Clerk of the Pells in his last Civil Establishment Bill, which had just become law. As soon as Walpole's papers came into the late Lord Holland's possession, this statement was readily seized upon by this nobleman, as evidence for staining Burke's virtue, and for proving what Lord Holland solemnly declared Burke to have been, always a jobber.* In fact, had Burke been a Rigby, no stronger language could have been employed against him than appears to have been habitually applied to him by the liberal Mæcenas of Holland House; who first gave the details of this negotiation for insertion in Moore's Life of Sheridan, and afterwards himself introduced it into Fox's Memorials and Correspondence, with the remark, that the proposal was not very creditable to Burke, and with the very frank confession that, "though it has no immediate connection with Mr. Fox, I cannot help extracting, or rather abridging it from Walpole's narrative."† It would indeed have been a remarkable instance of self-restraint, if Lord Holland could have helped extracting, abridging, or

* Moore's Diary, vol. iv. p. 218.

† Memorials and Correspondence of Fox, vol. i. p. 450.

even amplifying anything that he considered injurious to Burke's memory.

But it would not be difficult to question the credibility of Walpole's whole statement. Both in the original narrative, in the abridgment, and in the note of one of the editors, there are several serious mistakes and evident contradictions. Walpole himself even represents the proposed arrangement as in favour of Burke, while the letters and documents he has preserved, clearly show the negotiation to have been in favour of his son. Without, however, arguing the question on this narrow ground, and accepting the statement as a correct narrative of facts, it may fairly be asked whether, on leaving office in 1782, after three months only of enjoyment of the emoluments attending it, Burke's claims on the country were so very insignificant that it was discreditable in him to expect that his son should be provided for at the public expense.

In his great speech on economical reform, he had never professed to abolish all sinecures. He had, on the contrary, openly declared that some such places should be preserved, that substantial rewards might exist under other names than pensions, for the relatives of eminent men who had rendered distinguished services to the nation. For sixteen years he had laboured indefatigably in the public cause. During the only three months of his official life, he had surrendered all the exorbitant profits of the Pay Office ; and by the Pay Office Act alone, had, on a moderate computation, saved to the public purse no less than forty-seven thousand pounds a year.* He had voluntarily given up a lucrative contract which his predecessors had always enjoyed, for

* See the estimate in Burke's *Collected Speeches*, vol. ii. p. 401.

clothing the Chelsea pensioners; and by this single regulation had made the public a present of an additional thirteen hundred pounds a year.* He had, by his Civil Establishment Bill, attempted to save to the nation in hard money between two and three hundred thousand pounds a year; and notwithstanding every opposition from his own colleagues, and every curtailment and omission to which he was obliged to submit, he had succeeded, by means of the same Bill, in saving to the public expenditure seventy-three thousand pounds a year. Looking only at his three months of official labours as an economist, and putting out of view altogether the noble exertions of his genius, which had also sown the seeds of many more happy reformations, he had in three months saved to the public account between a hundred and twenty and a hundred and thirty thousand pounds a year.

Did those services deserve no reward? The grandfather of that Lord Holland who has reproached Burke with seeking to provide for his son, had been gorged with the profits of that very Pay Office which Burke reformed, and had been publicly stigmatized as the great defaulter of unaccounted millions. He had also provided his sons with sinecure on sinecure, and especially with the Irish Clerkship of the Pells, which Charles Fox sold to Jenkinson for money to supply his gambling extravagances. All the Walpoles, and particularly Horace, who records Burke's proposal to him, had most valuable sinecures secured to them, and their incomes were scrupulously respected by Burke in his plan of reform, on his avowed principle that as descendants of a great statesman whose life had been spent in the public business, they had a right to enjoy those

* Collected Speeches, vol. ii. p. 358.

lucrative testimonies of the public gratitude. Holland House itself, in which the late Lord Holland so liberally dispensed his hospitality to those who were eminent in politics and literature, and above all to those who agreed with him in estimating the transcendent virtues of his uncle, might be regarded as the existing monument of the enormous sums of money which his grandfather, Henry Fox, acquired from the revenues of the country. To an impartial observer it may perhaps appear, that in 1782, the claims of Burke's son to be provided for were almost as substantial as those of the sons of Sir Robert Walpole, and much more substantial than those of the descendants of Henry Fox. To be sure, poor young Richard Burke was the son of a man who by birth could not write the word Honourable before his Christian name. Hence those patrician tears.

In the case, however, there is an important feature which one of the two noble editors of this miserable calumny might have condescended to notice. When Burke, on entering the Pay Office, scrupulously refrained from taking anything more than a settled salary, and when, at such a sacrifice to himself, but at such a gain to the public, he set himself to carry out the great reforms in his own office, and every other department which he was allowed to touch, there was a distinct understanding with the Prime Minister at the time being, and his colleagues at the board of Treasury, that his labours were to receive adequate remuneration. An annuity certain was to be settled on his wife and son. Burke's letter to his friend William, at Madras, after kissing hands as Paymaster, is on this point quite decisive. Telling his kinsman that the office was to be reformed according to the Bill, and that his son was to be his deputy, he also added, evi-

dently as an understanding already come to, "Something is also to be secured for the life of young Richard, to be a security for him and his mother."* Lord Rockingham's death prevented this arrangement from being properly effected. As he was about to retire from office, and to begin another long course of opposition, Burke therefore went to Walpole with the proposal which, while it would have added nothing to his immediate fortune, would, in the event of his death, have provided something for Richard and Mrs. Burke. In all this there does not seem to be anything so very mercenary or so very discreditable. Burke was really only asking for what was morally his due. And who can doubt that had he chosen to desert Fox and remain in office, Lord Shelburne, as the price of such an acquisition at such a moment, would gladly have consented to any terms that he might have chosen to propose? Who can doubt that Shelburne, instead of being obliged to have recourse to William Pitt, then a young man of twenty-three, without any political experience, would readily have made Burke a member of the Cabinet and Leader of the House of Commons; and that the Premiership of England might, at no distant time, have been within his grasp? All the Earl's old enmities would have been gladly buried in oblivion, if only he could have obtained the devotion of Burke's mighty political genius, oratorical power, and great personal influence. Burke chose the other part; and his reward has been poverty, insult, detraction, between sixty and seventy years of obloquy from Fox's followers —and this posthumous slander so carefully cherished and reiterated by Fox's noble nephew.

To Burke, indeed, with the death of Lord Rockingham,

* Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 483.

evil times were approaching. He was not long in having some slight foretaste of the annoyances and vexations which he would be called upon to endure. On the ninth of July, when the Houses met, Mr. Coke of Norfolk brought forward a motion respecting the pension of four thousand a year granted to Colonel Barré. Pensionless himself, though the dearest and most confidential friend of the late Lord Rockingham, Burke had yet to defend this pension to his successor in the Pay Office and Lord Shelburne's close ally, as though Colonel Barré had really been a member of the Rockingham party, and the constant supporter of the deceased Prime Minister. As he rose, with sorrow depicted on his countenance for his recent loss, he was immediately greeted from Lord Shelburne's supporters about the bar, with scraping of the feet and other rude disturbances, just as he had been in the early days of his struggles in the House of Commons, and had again to suffer through his laborious and closing years from a generation that, knowing him not, neither respected his virtues nor appreciated his wisdom. He turned his eyes to the place from which the interruptions came, and with every accent of his voice betraying deep emotion contemptuously rebuked his thoughtless assailants. Acknowledging that Lord Rockingham had felt himself bound for the pension to Colonel Barré, he also clearly intimated that it was not on his most faithful follower that the virtuous nobleman had lavished the riches of the State. "Among all the encomiums made on the character of the noble Marquis lately deceased, this, said Burke, "was one: He left his dearest and best friends with the simple reward of his own invaluable intimacy. This singular test of their sincerity he asked while living, and it was a tax that he left on their regard for his

memory when dead." Having been accused by Conway, of haste in resigning his office, Burke declared that he was tired of Opposition, that he was anxious to do something for his family, and that, being fond of his place, it was scarcely likely that he would leave it unless he believed that a system contrary to his principles and the principles of the departed Marquis would be adopted. He thought that their policy would be reversed ; that Lord Shelburne was the direct opposite of the late Lord Rockingham in character ; and that if the Earl was not a Catiline or a Borgia in morals, it should not be ascribed to anything but his understanding.*

Tergiversation, disingenuity, prevarication, and trickery, were vices to which Burke's nature was peculiarly repugnant. No sane person ever could doubt that, though Lord Rockingham was the official instrument in granting Colonel Barré's pension, yet that it really was obtained by the influence of Barré's own patron, Lord Shelburne. Yet, instead of manfully avowing this grant, and defending it as a meritorious reward to a valuable public servant, as Burke would under the circumstances have done, the Earl publicly asserted that he had nothing whatever to do with the transaction, and threw all the odium of it on Lord Rockingham's memory. This Burke had especial reason for knowing to be untrue. The day after the debate in the Commons, Shelburne again maintained that the pension was Lord Rockingham's own measure, and asserted that he had a letter in his possession which demonstrated the fact. The late Marquis's colleagues at the Board of Treasury, Lord John Cavendish and Mr. Frederick Montague, confirming Burke's declarations, denied the truth of Shelburne's assertions. Burke avowed

* *Collected Speeches*, vol. ii. pp. 358-363.

his disbelief in the existence of any such letter from Lord Rockingham, and dared the Earl to bring it forward. Shelburne, after being thus openly challenged, did not produce the letter. Even to this day no such document has been published. There can be little hesitation in drawing the inference that either this letter never existed, or that it did not bear out the Earl's representations.

Lord Shelburne's history carries with it an instructive moral. He is the only Prime Minister of England the truth of whose word, when publicly pledged, has been as publicly contradicted, and whom his opponents have directly accused of falsehood. With all his arts and accomplishments, his character was supposed to have no solid foundation of truth or earnestness; and therefore, though professing popular principles, he never acquired the confidence of the great body of the people, and was never supported by the popular party in the House of Commons. A few months of office brought his career as a statesman to a close. The King who used him discarded him. The young Minister whom he elevated to the leadership of the House of Commons, willingly paid his debt of gratitude with a Marquisate, but carefully excluded from his Government the clever Marquis of his own creation. Though in the prime of life, Shelburne, in falling from power, sank into complete insignificance. In all political history there is scarcely another instance to be found of so sudden a fall, and so complete an extinction.

Lord Rockingham, on the contrary, though intellectually perhaps his rival's inferior, is still gratefully and respectfully remembered. The steady consistency with which he and Burke carried on the struggle against the

Court and the American war, from the first moment of their connection, deserves the cordial admiration of every conscientious politician. Lord Rockingham's calmness and moderation admirably tempered the zeal and impetuosity of the far-seeing man of genius, whose eagle eye was enraptured at the sight of that future on which it alone could gaze.

Burke henceforth stands alone. From this time both his life, and his times in connection with his life, assume a new aspect. The hopes by which he may have hitherto been buoyed up, of redeeming, by years of fruitful enjoyment in office, his years of unrequited labour in Opposition, were soon extinguished. As they expired he devoted himself only the more exclusively to great philanthropic objects far beyond the routine of the ordinary statesman, or the estimate of any mere political success. These labours require impartial treatment. They demand a candid, lofty, and respectful consideration. Any verdict pronounced upon them from their supposed tendency to advance either Whigs or Tories to office, is likely to be unwarrantable. Yet they seem to be invested with a grandeur, beauty, and pathos, such as have hallowed the struggles of no other politician. Burke's sixteen years' exertions in the affairs of India, and the impeachment of Hastings; his writings and conduct, from the first outbreak of the great democratic impulse in France, to his final attitude, while contemplating that spirit of change and turmoil which was then coming upon the nations, and has yet far from attained its final development; his busy retirement, with the prostration of his earthly hopes, and his heartbroken and desolate old-age, attended with all his glowing interest in the business of mankind, and all the overpowering brilliancy and match-

less vigour of his gigantic intellect to the last, may, I believe, form together a noble and instructive spectacle, equal, if not superior in interest to any that his career has yet displayed. Having endeavoured to follow him faithfully through the great historical scenes which have already been passed in review, I pause at the natural termination of the period with the death of Lord Rockingham and the close of the American war. I hope, however, soon to resume the task, in itself no ungrateful labour, and reverently accompany Burke to that last sad hour, when amid the convulsive throes of agonized Europe he bade to all human affairs a loving, anxious, and eternal farewell.

END OF VOLUME II.

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